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OLD COURT LIFE IN FRANCE.

BY

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"THE DIARY OF AN IDLE WOMAN," "PICTURES OF OLD ROME," ETC. ETC.

IN TWO VOLUMES.

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TO MY NIECE,

THE COUNTESS OF MINTO,

This Work

IS INSCRIBED.

PREFACE.

All my life I have been a student of French memoir-history. In this species of literature France is remarkably rich. There exist contemporary memoirs and chronicles, from a very early period down to the present time, in which are preserved not only admirable outlooks over general events, but details of language, character, dress, and manners, not to be found elsewhere. I was bold enough to fancy that somewhat yet remained to tell; —say—of the caprices and eccentricities of Louis XIII., of the homeliness of Henri Quatre, of the feminine tenderness of Gabrielle d'Estrées, of the lofty piety and unquestioning confidence of Louise de Lafayette, of the romantic vicissitudes of Mademoiselle de Montpensier; and that some pictures might be made of these old French personages for English readers in a way that should pourtray the substance and spirit of history, without affecting to maintain its form and dress.

In all I have written I have sought carefully to work into my dialogue each word and sentence recorded of the individual, every available trait or peculiarity of character

to be found in contemporary memoirs, every tradition that has come down to us.

To be true to life has been my object. Keeping close to the background of history, I have endeavoured to group the figures of my foreground as they grouped themselves in actual life. I have framed them in the frames in which they really lived.

FRANCES ELLIOT.

FARLEY HILL COURT,
Christmas, 1872.

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OLD COURT LIFE IN FRANCE.

CHAPTER I.

FRANCIS I.

We are in the sixteenth century. Europe is young in artistic life. The minds of men are moved by the discussions, councils, protests, and contentions of the Reformation. The printing press is spreading knowledge into every corner of the globe.

At this period, three highly educated and unscrupulous young men divide the power of Europe. They are Henry VIII. of England, Charles V. of Austria, and Francis I. of France. Each is magnificent in taste; each is desirous of power and conquest. Each acts as a spur to the others both in peace and in war. They introduce the cultivated tastes, the refined habits, the freedom of thought of modern life, and from the period in which they flourish modern history dates.

Of these three monarchs Francis is the boldest, cleverest, and most profligate. The elegance, refinement, and luxury of his court, are unrivalled; and this luxury strikes the senses from its contrast with the frugal habits of the ascetic Louis XI. and the homely Louis XII.

His reign educated Europe. If ambition led him towards Italy, it was as much to capture the arts of that classic land and to bear them back in triumph to France, as to acquire the actual territory. Francis introduced the French Renaissance, that subtle union of elaborate ornamentation with purity of design which was the renovation of art. When and how he acquired such exact appreciation of the beautiful is unexplained. That he possessed judgment and taste is proved by the monuments he left behind, and by his patronage of the greatest masters of their several arts.

The wealth of beauty and colour, the flowing lines of almost divine expression in the works of the Italian painters of the Cinque-cento, delighted the sensuous soul of Francis. Wherever he lived he gathered treasures of their art around him. Such a nature as his had no sympathy with the meritorious but precise elaboration of the contemporary Dutch school, led by the Van Eycks and Holbein.

It was Leonardo da Vinci, the head of the Milanese school, who blended power and tenderness, that Francis delighted to honour. He brought Cellini, Primaticcio, and Leonardo from Italy, and never wearied of their company. He established the aged Leonardo at the Château de Clos, near his own castle of Amboise, where the painter is said to have died in the arms of his royal patron.

As an architect, Francis left his mark beyond any other sovereign of Europe. He transformed the gloomy fortress-home—embattled, turreted, and moated—into the elaborately decorated, manorial château. The bare and foot-trodden space without, enclosed with walls of defence, was changed into green lawns and over-arching bowers breaking the vista toward the royal forest, the flowing river, and the open campagne.

Francis had a mania for building. Like Louis XIV., who in the century following built among the sandhills of Versailles, Francis insisted on creating a fairy palace amid the flat and dusty plains of Sologne. Here the Renaissance was to achieve its triumph. At Chambord, near Blois, were massed every device, decoration, and eccentricity of his favourite style. So identified was this place with its creator, that even his intriguing

life peeps out in the double staircase under the central tower—representing a gigantic fleur-de-lys in stone—where those who ascend are invisible to those who descend; in the doors, concealed in sliding panels behind the arras; and in many double walls and secret stairs.

Azay le Rideau, built on a beautifully wooded island on the river Indre, though less known than Chambord, was and is an exquisite specimen of the Renaissance. It owes the fascination of its graceful outlines and peculiar ornamentation to the master-hand which has graven his crowned F and Salamander on its quaint façades. The Louvre and Fontainebleau are also signed by these monograms. He, and his son Henry II., made these piles the historic monuments we now behold.

Such was Francis, the artist. As a soldier, he followed in the steps of Bayard, "Sans peur et sans reproche." He perfected that poetic code of honour which reconciles the wildest courage with generosity towards an enemy. A knight-errant in love of danger and adventure, Francis comes to us as the perfect type of the chivalrous Frenchman; ready to do battle on any provocation either as king or gentleman, either at the head of his army, in the tournament, or in the duello. He loved all that

was gay, bright, and beautiful. He delighted in the repose of peace, yet no monarch ever plunged his country into more ruinous and causeless wars. Though capable of the tenderest and purest affection, no man was ever more heartless and cruel in principle and conduct.

Francis, Duc de Valois,[1] was educated at home by his mother, Madame Louise de Savoie, Duchesse d'Angoulême, Regent of France, together with his brilliant sister, Marguerite, "the pearl of the Valois," poetess, story-teller, artist, and politician. Each of these royal ladies was tenderly attached to the clever, handsome youth, and together formed what they chose to call "a trinity of love." The old Castle of Amboise, in Touraine, the favourite abode of Louis XII., continued to be their home after his death. Here, too, the hand of Francis is to be traced in sculptured windows and architectural façades, in noble halls and broad galleries, and in the stately terraced gardens overlooking the Loire which flows beneath its walls. Here, under the formal lime alleys and flowering groves, or in the shadow of the still fortified bastions, the brother and sister sat or wandered side by side, on many a summer day; read and talked of

[1] See Note 1.

poetry and troubadours, of romance and chivalry, of Arthur, Roland and Charlemagne, of spells and witcheries, and of Merlin the enchanter, whose magic failed before a woman's glance.

Printing at that time having become general, literature of all kinds circulated in every direction, stirring men's minds with fresh tides of knowledge. Marguerite de Valois, who was called "the tenth Muse," dwelt upon poetry and fiction, and already meditated her Boccaccio-like stories, afterwards to be published under the title of the "Heptameron." Francis gloated over such adventures as were detailed in the roundelay of the "Four Sons of Aymon," a ballad of that day, devoured the history of "Amadis de Gaul," and tried his hand in twisting many a love-rhyme, after the fashion of the "Romaunt of the Rose."

In such an idyllic life of love, of solitude, and of thought, full of the humanising courtesies of family life, was formed the paradoxical character of Francis, who above all men possessed what the French describe as "the reverse of his qualities." His fierce passions still slumbered, his imagination was filled with poetry, his heart beat high with the endearing love of a brother and a son. His reckless courage vented itself in the chase, among the royal forests

of Amboise and of Chanteloup, that darkened the adjacent hills, or in a tustle with the boorish citizens, or travelling merchants, in the town below.

Thus he grew into manhood, his stately yet condescending manners, handsome person, and romantic courage, gaining him devoted adherents. Yet when we remember that Francis served as the type for Hugo's play of *Le Roi s'amuse* we pause and —think.

CHAPTER II.

CHARLES DE BOURBON.

THE Court is at Amboise. Francis is only twenty, and still solicits the advice of his mother, Louise de Savoie, regent during his minority. Marguerite, now married to the Duc d'Alençon, has also considerable influence over him. Both these princesses, who are with him at Amboise, insist on the claims of their kinsman, Charles de Montpensier, Duc de Bourbon,—in right of his wife, Suzanne, only daughter and heiress of Pierre, the last duke,—to be appointed Constable of France. It is an office next in power to the sovereign, and has not been revived since the treasonable conspiracy of the Comte de St. Pol, in the reign of Louis XI.

Bourbon is only twenty-six, but he is already a hero. He has braved death again and again in the battle-field with dauntless valour. In person he is tall and handsome. In manners, he is frank,

bold, and prepossessing; but when offended, his proud nature easily turns to vindictive and almost savage revenge. Invested with the double dignity of General of the royal forces and Constable of France, he comes to Amboise to salute the King and the princesses, who are both strangely interested in his career, and to take the last commands from Francis, who does not now propose accompanying his army into Italy.

There is a restless, mobile expression on Bourbon's dark yet comely face, that tells of strong passions ill suppressed. A man capable of ardent and devoted love, and of bitter hate; his marriage with his cousin Suzanne, lately dead, had been altogether a political alliance to bring him royal kindred, wealth, and power. Suzanne had failed to interest his heart. It is said that another passion has long engaged him. Francis may have some hint as to who the lady is, and may resent Bourbon's presumption. At all events, the Constable is no favourite with the King. He dislikes his *fanfaronnade* and haughty address. He loves not either to see a subject of his own age so powerful and so magnificent; it trenches too much on his own prerogatives of success. Besides, as lads, Bourbon and Francis had quarrelled at a game of

maille. The King had challenged Bourbon but had never fought him, and Bourbon resented this refusal as an affront to his honour.

The Constable, mounted on a splendid charger, with housings of black velvet, and attended by a brilliant suite, gallops into the courtyard. His fine person is set off by a rich surcoat, worn over a suit of gilded armour. He wears a red and white panache in his helmet, and his sword and dagger are thickly incrusted with diamonds.

At the top of the grand staircase are posted one hundred archers; royal pages conduct the Constable through the range of state apartments.

The King receives Bourbon in the great gallery hung with tapestry. He is seated on a chair of state, ornamented with elaborate carving, on which the arms of France are in high relief. This chair is placed on a raised floor, or dais, covered with a carpet. Beside him stands the grand master of the ceremonies, who introduces the Constable to the King. Francis, who inclines his head and raises his cap for an instant, is courteous but cold. Marguerite d'Alençon is present; like Bourbon, she is unhappily mated. The Duc d'Alençon is, physically and mentally, her inferior. When the Constable salutes the King, Mar-

guerite stands apart. Conscious that her brother's eyes read her thoughts, she blushes deeply and averts her face. Bourbon advances to the spot where she is seated in the recess of an oriel window. He bows low before her; Marguerite rises, and offers him her hand. Their eyes meet. There is no disguise in the passionate glance of the Constable; Marguerite, confused and embarrassed, turns away.

"Has your highness no word of kindness for your kinsman?" says the Constable, in a low voice.

"You know, cousin, your interests are ever dear to me," replies she, in the same tone; then, curtseying deeply to the King, she takes the arm of her husband, M. d'Alençon, who was killing flies at the window, and leaves the gallery.

"Diable!" says Francis to his confidant, Claude de Guise, in an undertone; "My sister is scarcely civil to the Constable. Did you observe, she hardly answered him? All the better. It will teach Bourbon humility, and not to look too high for a mate."

"Yet her highness pleaded eagerly with your Majesty for his advancement."

"Yes, yes; that was to please our mother. Suzanne de Bourbon was her cousin, and the Regent

promised her before her death to support her husband's claims."

Meanwhile, the Constable receives, with a somewhat reserved and haughty civility, the compliments of the Court. He is conscious of an antagonistic atmosphere. It is well known that the King loves him not; and whom the King loves not neither does the courtier.

A page then approaches, and invites the Constable, in the name of Queen Claude, to join her afternoon circle. Meanwhile, he is charged to conduct the Constable to an audience with the Regent-mother, who awaits him in her apartments.

The King had been cool and the Princess silent and reserved: not so the Regent Louise de Savoie, who advances to meet the Constable with unmistakable eagerness.

"I congratulate you, my cousin," she says, holding out both her hands to him, which he receives kneeling, "on the dignity with which my son has invested you. I may add, that I was not altogether idle in the matter."

"Your highness will, I hope, be justified in the favour you have shown me," replies the Constable coldly.

"Be seated, my cousin," continues Louise. "I have desired to see you alone that I might fully explain with what grief I find myself obliged, by the express orders of my son, to dispute with a kinsman I so much esteem as yourself"—she pauses a moment, the Constable bows gravely—"the inheritance of my poor cousin, your wife, Madame Suzanne de Bourbon. Suzanne was dear to me, and you also, Constable, have a high place in my regard."

Louise ceases. She looks significantly at the Constable, as if waiting for him to answer; but he does not reply, and again bows.

"I am placed," continues the Regent, the colour gathering on her cheek, "in a most painful alternative. The Chancellor has insisted on the legality of my claims—claims on the inheritance of your late wife, daughter of Pierre, Duc de Bourbon, my cousin. I will not trouble you with details. My son urges the suit. My own feelings plead strongly against proceeding any farther in the matter." She hesitates and stops.

"Your highness is of course aware that the loss of this suit would be absolute ruin to me?" says Bourbon, looking hard at Louise.

"I fear it would be most disastrous to your for-

tunes. That they are dear to me, judge—you are by my interest made Constable of France, second only in power to my son."

"I have already expressed my gratitude, madame."

"But, Constable," continues Louise de Savoie, speaking with much animation, "why have you insisted on your claims—why not have trusted to the gratitude of the King towards a brave and zealous subject? Why not have counted on myself, who have both power and will, as I have shown, to protect you?"

"The generosity of the King and your highness's favour, which I accept with gratitude, have nothing to do with the legal rights of my late wife's inheritance. I desire not, madame, to be beholden in such matters even to your highness or to his Majesty."

"Well, Constable, well, as you will; you are, I know, of a proud and noble nature. But I have desired earnestly," and the Regent rises and places herself on another chair nearer the Constable, "to ascertain from your own lips if this suit cannot be settled *à l'amiable*. There are many means of accommodating a lawsuit, Duke. Madame Anne, wife of two kings of France, saved Brittany from cruel wars in a manner worthy of imitation."

"Truly," replies Bourbon with a sigh; "but I know not what princess of the blood would enable me to accommodate your highness's suit in so agreeable a manner."

"Have you not yourself formed some opinion on the subject?" asks Louise, looking at the Constable with undisguised tenderness.

"No, madame, I have not. Since the hand of your beautiful daughter, Madame Marguerite, is engaged, I know no one."

"But—" and she hesitates, and again turns her eyes upon him, which the Constable does not observe, as he is adjusting the hilt of his dagger—"but—you forget, Duke, that I am a widow."

As she speaks she places her hand upon that of the Constable, and gazes into his face. Bourbon starts violently and looks up. Louise de Savoie, still holding his hand, meets his gaze with an unmistakable expression. She is forty years old, but vain and intriguing. There is a pause. Then the Constable rises and drops the hand which had rested so softly upon his own. His handsome face darkens into a look of disgust. A flush of rage sends the blood tingling to the cheeks of Louise.

"Your highness mistakes me," says Bourbon.

"The respect I owe to his Majesty, the disparity of our years, my own feelings, all render such an union impossible. Your highness does me great honour, but I do not at present intend to contract any other alliance. If his Majesty goes to law with me, why I will fight him, madame,—that is all."

"Enough," answers Louise in a hoarse voice, "I understand." The Constable makes a profound obeisance and retires.

This interview was the first act in that long and intricate drama by which the spite of a mortified woman drove the Duc de Bourbon—the greatest general of his age, under whom the arms of France never knew defeat—to become a traitor to his king and to France.

CHAPTER III.

BROTHER AND SISTER.

YEARS have passed; Francis, with his wife, Queen Claude, daughter of Louis XII. and Anne of Brittany, is at Chambord, in the Touraine. Claude, but for the Salic law, would have been Queen of France. In her childhood she was affianced to Charles, son of Philip the Fair, afterwards Charles V. of Germany, the great rival of Francis. Francis had never loved her, the union had been political; yet Claude is gentle and devoted, and he says of her, "that her soul is as a rose without a thorn." This queen—the darling of her parents—can neither bear the indifference nor the infidelity of her brilliant husband, and dies of her neglected love at the early age of twenty-five.

Marguerite d'Alençon, the Duke her husband, and the Court, are assembled for hunting in the forests of Sologne. Chambord, then but a gloomy

mediæval fortress lying on low swampy lands on the banks of the river Casson, is barely large enough to accommodate the royal party. Already Francis meditates many changes; the course of the river Loire, some fifteen miles distant, is to be turned in order to bathe the walls of a sumptuous palace, not yet fully conceived in the brain of the royal architect.

It is spring; Francis is seated in the broad embrasure of an oriel window, in an oak-panelled saloon which looks towards the surrounding forest. He eagerly watches the gathering clouds that veil the sun and threaten to prevent the boar-hunt projected for that morning. Beside him, in the window, sits his sister Marguerite. She wears a black velvet riding-habit, faced with gold; her luxuriant hair is gathered into a net under a plumed hat on which a diamond aigrette glistens. At the farther end of the room Queen Claude is seated on a high-backed chair, richly carved, in the midst of her ladies. She is embroidering an altar-cloth; her face is pale and very plaintive. She is young, and, though not beautiful, there is an angelic expression in her large grey eyes, a dimpling sweetness about her mouth, that indicate a nature worthy to have won the love of any man, not such a libertine as

Francis. Her dress is plain and rich, of grey satin trimmed with ermine; a jewelled coif is upon her head. She bends over her work, now and then raising her wistful eyes with an anxious look towards the King. The Queen's habits are sedentary, and the issue of the hunting party is of no personal interest to her; she always remains at home with her children and ladies. Many attendant lords, attired for hunting, are waiting his Majesty's pleasure in the adjoining gallery.

"Marguerite," says the King, turning to the Duchesse d'Alençon, as the sun reappears out of a bank of cloud, "the weather mends; in a quarter of an hour we shall start. Meanwhile, dear sister, sit beside me. *Morbleu*, how well that riding-dress becomes you! You are very handsome, and worthy to be called the Rose of the Valois. There are few royal ladies in our Court to compare to you;" and Francis glances significantly at his gentle Queen, busy over her embroidery, as if to say—"Would that she resembled you!"

Marguerite, proud of her brother's praise, reddens with pleasure and reseats herself at his side. "By-and-by I shall knock down this sombre old fortress," continues Francis, looking out of the window at the gloomy façade, "and transform it

into a hunting château. The situation pleases me, and the surrounding forest is full of game."

"My brother," says Marguerite, interrupting him and speaking in an earnest voice, for her eyes have not followed the direction of the King's, which are fixed on the prospect; she seems not to have heard his remarks, and her bright look has changed into an anxious expression; "my brother, tell me, have you decided upon the absolute ruin of Bourbon? Think how his haughty spirit must chafe under the repeated marks of your displeasure." They are both silent. Marguerite's eyes are riveted upon the King. Francis is embarrassed. He averts his face from the suppliant look cast upon him by his sister, and again turns to the window, as if to watch the rapidly passing clouds.

"My sister," he says at length, "Bourbon is not a loyal subject; he is unworthy of your regard."

"Sire, I cannot believe it. Bourbon is no traitor! But, my brother, if he were, have you not tried him sorely? Have you not driven him from you by an intolerable sense of injury? Oh, Francis, remember he is our kinsman, your most zealous servant;—did he not save your life at Marignano? Who among your generals is cool,

daring, valiant, wise as Bourbon? Has he not borne our flag triumphantly through Italy? Have the French troops under him ever known defeat? Yet, my brother, you have now publicly disgraced him." Her voice trembles with emotion; she is very pale, and her eyes fill with tears.

"By the mass, Marguerite, no living soul, save our mother, would dare to address me thus!" exclaims the King, turning towards her. He is much moved. Then, examining her countenance, he adds, "You are strangely agitated, my sister. What concern have you with the Constable? Believe me, I have made Bourbon too powerful."

"Not now, not now, Francis, when you have, at the request of a woman — of Madame de Châteaubriand too—taken from him the government of Milan; when he is superseded in his command; when our mother is pressing on him a ruinous suit, with your sanction."

At the name of Madame de Châteaubriand Marguerite's whole countenance darkens with anger, the King's face grows crimson.

"My sister, you plead Bourbon's cause warmly —too warmly, methinks," and Francis turns his head aside to conceal his confusion.

"Not only has your Majesty taken from him the government of Milan," continues Marguerite bitterly, unheeding the King's interruption, "but he has been replaced by Lautrec, brother of Madame de Châteaubriand, an inexperienced soldier, unfitted for such an important post. Oh, my brother, you are driving Bourbon to despair. So great a general cannot hang up his victorious sword."

"By my faith, sister, you press me hard," replies the King, recovering the gentle tone with which he always addressed her; "I will communicate with my council; what you have said shall be duly considered. Meanwhile, if Bourbon inspires you with such interest, as it seems he does, tell him to humble his pride and submit himself to us, his sovereign and his master. If he do, he shall be greater than ever, I promise you." As he speaks, he glances at Marguerite, whose eyes fall to the ground. "But see, my sister, the sun is shining; and there is some one already mounting in the courtyard. Give the signal for departure, Comte de Saint-Vallier," says the King in a louder voice, turning towards two gentlemen standing at an opposite window in the gallery. The King has to repeat his command before the Comte de Saint-Vallier hears him. "Saint-Vallier,

you are in deep converse with De Pompérant. Is it love or war?"

"Neither, Sire," replies the Captain of the Royal Archers, looking embarrassed.

"M. de Pompérant, are you going with us to-day to hunt the boar?" says the King, advancing towards them.

"Sire," replies De Pompérant, bowing profoundly, "your Majesty does me great honour; but, with your leave, I will not accompany the hunt. Urgent business calls me from Chambord."

"Ah, *coquin*, it is an assignation; confess it," and a wicked gleam lights up the King's eyes.

"No, Sire," says De Pompérant. "I go to join the Constable de Bourbon, who is indisposed."

"Ah! to join the Constable!" Francis pauses and looks at him. "I know he is your friend," continues he, suddenly becoming very grave. "Where is he?"

"At his fortress of Chantelle, Sire."

"At Chantelle! a fortified place, and without my permission. Truly, Monsieur de Pompérant, your friend is a daring subject. What if I will not trust you in his company, and command your attendance on our person here at Chambord?"

"Then, Sire, I should obey," replies De Pompé-

rant; "but let your gracious Majesty remember the Duc de Bourbon is ill; he is a broken and ruined man, deprived of your favour. Chantelle is more a château than a fortress."

"Go, De Pompérant; I did but jest. Tell Bourbon, on the word of a king, that he has warm friends near my person; that if the Regent-mother gains her suit against him, I will restore tenfold to him in money, lands, and honour. Adieu, Monsieur de Pompérant. You are dismissed. Bon voyage."

Now, the truth was that De Pompérant had come to Chambord upon a secret mission from Bourbon, who wished to assure himself of those gentlemen of the Court upon whom he could rely in case of rebellion. The Comte de Saint-Vallier had just, while standing at the window, pledged his word to stand by Bourbon for life or death.

The King is now mounting his horse in the courtyard, a noble bay with glittering harness. He gives the signal of departure, which is echoed through the woodland recesses by the bugles of the huntsmen. A lovely lady attired in white has joined the royal retinue in the courtyard. She rides on in front beside the King, who, the

better to converse with her, has placed his hand upon her horse's neck. This is Françoise, Comtesse de Châteaubriand, the favourite of the hour—at whose request Bourbon had been superseded in the government of Milan by her brother Lautrec.

Behind this pair rides Marguerite d'Alençon with her husband, the Comte de Guise, Montmorenci, Bonnivet, and other nobles. A large cavalcade of courtiers follows. Since her conversation with her brother, Marguerite looks thoughtful and anxious. She is so absent that she does not even hear the prattle of her husband, who is content to talk and cares not for reply. On reaching the dense thickets of the forest she suddenly reins up her horse, and, falling back a little, beckons the Comte de Saint-Vallier to her side.

"M. le Comte," she says in a loud voice, so as to be overheard by her husband and the other gentlemen riding in advance, "tell me when is the Court to be graced by the presence of your incomparable daughter, Madame Diane, Grande Seneschale of Normandy?"

"Madame," replies Saint-Vallier, "her husband, Monseigneur de Brèzè, is much occupied in his distant government. Diane is young, much younger

than her husband. The Court, madame, is dangerously full of temptations to the young."

"We lose a bright jewel by her absence," says Marguerite abstractedly. "M. le Comte," she continues in a low voice, speaking quickly, and motioning to him with her hand to approach nearer, "I have something private to say to you. Ride close by my side. You are a friend of the Constable de Bourbon?" she asks eagerly.

"Yes, madame, I am."

"You are, perhaps, his confidant? Speak freely to me; I feel deeply the misfortunes of the Duke. I would aid him if I could. Is there any foundation for the suspicion with which my brother regards him? You will not deceive me, Monsieur de Poitiers?"

Saint-Vallier does not answer at once. "The Constable de Bourbon will never, I trust, betray his Majesty," replies he at last, with hesitation.

"Alas! my poor cousin! Is that all the assurance you can give me, Monsieur de Saint-Vallier? Oh! he is incapable of treason," exclaims Marguerite with enthusiasm; "I would venture my life he is incapable of treason!"

A courier passes them at this moment, riding with hot speed. He nears the King, who is now far on

in front, and who, hearing the sound of the horse's hoofs, stops and listens. The messenger hands the King a dispatch. Francis hastily breaks the seal. It is from Lautrec, the new governor of Milan. Bourbon is in open rebellion.

Bourbon in open rebellion! This intelligence necessitates the instant presence of the King at Paris.

CHAPTER IV.

THE QUALITY OF MERCY.

FRANCIS is at the Louvre, surrounded by his most devoted friends and councillors, Chabannes, La Trémouille, Bonnivet, Montmorenci, Crequi, Cossé, De Guise, and the two Du Bellays. The Louvre is still the isolated stronghold, castle, palace, and prison, surrounded by moat, walls, and bastions, built by Philippe Auguste on the grassy margin of the Seine. In the centre of the inner court is a round tower, also moated, and defended by ramparts, ill-famed in feudal annals for its oubliettes and dungeons, under which the river flows. Four gates, with posterns and towers, open from the Louvre; that one opposite the Seine is the strongest. The southern gate—which is low and narrow, with statues on either hand of Charles V. and his wife, Jeanne de Bourbon—faces the Church of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois.[1] Beyond are gardens and

[1] See Note 2.

orchards, and a house, called Fromenteau, where lions are kept for the King's amusement.

These are the days of stately manners, intellectual culture, and increasing knowledge. Personal honour as from man to man is a religion, of which Bayard is the high priest; treachery to woman, a virtue inculcated by the King. The idle, vapid life of later courts is unknown under a monarch who, however addicted to pleasure, cultivates all kinds of knowledge, whose inquiring intellect seeks to master all science, to whom indolence is impossible. His very meals are chosen moments in which he converses with authors, poets, and artists, or dictates letters to Erasmus and the learned Greek Lascaris. Such industry and dignity, such grace and condescension, gather around him the great spirits of the age. He delights in their company.

It is the King's boast that he has introduced into France the study of the Greek language, Botany, and Natural History. He buys, at enormous prices, pictures, pottery, enamels, statues, and manuscripts. As in his fervid youth at Amboise, he loves poetry and poets. Clément Marot is his chosen guest, and polishes the King's rhymes, of which some delicate and touching stanzas

(those on Agnes Sorel,[1] especially) have come down to us.

Even that witty heretic, Rabelais, found both an appreciative protector and intelligent friend in a sovereign superior to the prejudices of his age. With learning, poetry, wit, and intellect, come luxury and boundless extravagance. Brantôme speaks as with bated breath of the royal expenditure. These are the days of broad sombrero hats fringed with gold and looped up with priceless jewels and feathers; of embroidered cloaks in costly stuffs—heavy with gold or silver embroidery—hung over the shoulder; of slashed hose and richly chased rapiers; of garments of cloth of gold, embroidered with armorial bearings in jewels; of satin justaucorps covered with rivières of diamonds, emeralds, and oriental pearls; of torsades and collars wherein gold is but the foil to priceless gems. The ladies wear eastern silks and golden tissues, with trimmings of rare furs; wide sleeves and Spanish fardingales, sparkling coifs and jewelled nets, with glittering veils. They ride in ponderous coaches covered with carving and gilding, or on horses whose pedigrees are as undoubted as their own, covered with velvet housings and with silken

[1] See Note 3.

nets woven with jewels, their manes plaited with gold and precious stones. But these illustrious ladies consider gloves a royal luxury, and are weak in respect of stockings.

Foremost in every gorgeous mode is Francis. He wears rich Genoa velvets, and affects bright colours—rose and sky-blue. A Spanish hat is on his head, turned up with a white plume, fastened to an aigrette of rubies, with a golden salamander his device, signifying, "I am nourished and I die in fire" (Je me nourris et je meurs dans le feu).

How well we know his dissipated though distinguished features, as portrayed by Titian! His long nose, small eyes, broad cheeks, and cynical mouth. He moves with careless grace, as one who would say, "*Que m'importe?* I am King of France; nought comes amiss to me."

Now he walks up and down the council-room in the Louvre which looks towards the river. His step is quick and agitated, his face wears an unusual frown. He calls Bonnivet to him and addresses him in a low voice, while the other nobles stand back.

"Am I to believe that Bourbon has not merely rebelled against me, but that the traitor has fled into Spain and made terms with Charles?"

"Your Majesty's information is precise."

"What was the manner of his flight?"

"The Duke, Sire, waited at his fortress of Chantelle until the arrival of Monsieur de Pompérant from your Majesty's Court at Chambord, feigning sickness and remaining shut up within his apartments. After Monsieur de Pompérant's arrival, a litter was ordered to await his pleasure, and De Pompérant, dressed in the clothes of the Duke and with his face concealed by a hood, was carried into the litter, which started for Moulins, travelling slowly. Meanwhile Bourbon, accompanied by a band of gentlemen, was galloping on the road to the frontier. He was last seen at Saint-Jean de Luz, in the Pyrenees."

"By our Lady!" exclaims Francis, "such treason is a blot upon knighthood. Bourbon, a man whom we had made as great as ourselves!"

"The Duke, Sire, left a message for your Majesty."

"A message! Where? and who bore it?"

"De Pompérant, Sire, who has already been arrested at Moulins. The Duke begged your Majesty to take back the sword which you had given him, and prayed you to send for the badge which he left hanging at the head of his bed at Chantelle."

"Diable! does the villain dare to point his jests at his sovereign?" and Francis flushes to the roots of his hair with passion. "I wish I had him face to face in a fair field"—and he lays his hand on the hilt of his sword;—"but no," he adds in a calmer voice, "a traitor's blood would but soil my weapon. Let him carry his perfidy into Spain—'twill suit the Emperor; I am well rid of him. Are there many accomplices, Bonnivet?"

"About two hundred, Sire."

"Is it possible! Do we know them?"

"The Comte de Saint-Vallier, Sire, is the principal accomplice."

"What! Saint-Vallier, the Captain of our Archers! That strikes us nearly. This conspiracy, my lords," says Francis, advancing to where Guise, La Trémouille, Montmorenci, and the others stand somewhat apart during his conversation with Bonnivet, "is much more serious than I imagined. I must remain in France to wait the issue of events. You, Bonnivet, must take command of the Italian campaign."

Bonnivet kneels and kisses the hand of Francis.

"I am sorry for Jean de Poitiers," continues Francis, turning to Guise. "Are the proofs against him certain?"

"Sire, Saint-Vallier accompanied the Constable to the frontier."

"I am sorry," repeats the King, and he passes his hand thoughtfully over his brow and muses.

"Jean de Poitiers, my *ci-devant* Captain of the Guards, is the father of a charming lady; Madame Diane, the Seneschale of Normandy, is an angel, though her husband, De Brèzè—hum—why, he is a monster. Vulcan and Venus—the old story, eh, my lords?"

There is a general laugh.

A page enters and announces a lady humbly craving to speak with his Majesty. The King smiles, his wicked eyes glisten. "Who? what? Do I know her?"

"Sire, the lady is deeply veiled; she desires to speak with your Majesty alone."

"But, by St. Denis—do I know her?"

"I think, Sire, it is the wife of the Grand Seneschal of Normandy—Madame Diane de Brèzè."

There is a pause, some whispering, and a low laugh is heard. The King looks around displeased. "I am not surprised," says he. "When I heard of the father's danger I expected the daughter's intercession. Let the lady enter."

With a wave of his hand he dismisses the Court,

and seats himself on a chair of state under a rich canopy embroidered in gold with the arms of France.

Diane enters. She is dressed in long black robes which sweep the floor. Her head is covered with a thick lace veil which she raises as she approaches the King. She weeps, but her tears do not mar her beauty, which is absolutely radiant. She is exquisitely fair and wonderfully fresh, with golden hair and dark eyebrows—a most winsome lady.

She throws herself at the King's feet. She clasps her hands. Her sobs drown her voice.

"Pardon, Sire, pardon my father!" she at length falters. The King stoops forward, and raises her to the estrade on which he stands. He looks tenderly into her soft blue eyes, his hands are locked in hers.

"Your father, madame, my old and trusted servant, is guilty of treason."

"Alas! Sire, I fear so; but he is old, too old for punishment. He has been hitherto a true subject of your Majesty."

"He is blessed, madame, with a most surpassing daughter." Francis pauses and looks steadfastly at her with eyes of ardent admiration. "But I fear I must confirm the sentence of my judges, madame; your father is certain to be found guilty of treason."

"Oh! Sire, mercy, mercy! grant me my father's life, I implore you;" and again Diane falls prostrate at the King's feet, and looks supplicatingly into his face. Again the King raises her.

"Well, madame, you are aware that you desire the pardon of a traitor; on what ground do you ask for his life?"

"Sire, I ask it for the sake of mercy; mercy is the privilege of kings," and her soft eyes seek those of Francis and rest upon them. "I have come so far, too, from Normandy, to invoke it—my poor father!" and she sobs again. "Your Majesty will not send me back refused, broken-hearted?" Still her eyes are fixed upon the King.

"Mercy, Madame Diane, is, doubtless, a royal prerogative. I am an anointed king," and he lets go her hands, and draws himself up proudly, "and I may use it; but the prerogative of a woman is beauty. Beauty, Madame Diane," adds Francis, with a glance at the lovely woman still kneeling at his feet, "is more potent than a king's word."

There is silence for a few moments. Diane's eyes are now bent upon the ground, her bosom heaves. Francis contemplates her with delight.

"Will you, fair lady, deign to exercise your prerogative?"

"Truly, Sire, I know not what your Majesty would say," replies Diane, looking down and blushing.

Something in his eyes gives her hope, for she starts violently, rises, and clasping her hands together exclaims, "How, Sire! do I read your meaning aright? can I, by my humble service to your Majesty——"

"Yes, fair lady, you can. Your presence at my Court, where your adorable beauty shall receive due homage, will be my hostage for your father's loyalty. Madame Diane, I declare that the Comte de Saint-Vallier is PARDONED. Though he had rent the crown from off our head, your father is pardoned. And I add, madame, that it was the charm of his daughter that rendered a refusal impossible."

Madame Diane's face shines like April sunshine through rain-drops; a smile parts her lips, and her glistening eyes dance with joy; she is more lovely than ever.

"Thanks, thanks, Sire!" And again she would have knelt, but the King again takes her hands, and looks into her face so earnestly that she again blushes.

Did that look of the King fascinate her? or did the sudden joy of saving her father move her

heart with love? Who can tell? It is certain, however, that from this time Diane left Normandy, and became one of the brightest ornaments of that beauty-loving Court. Diane was a woman of masculine understanding, concealed under the gentlest and most fascinating manners; but she was also mercenary, intriguing, and domineering. Of her beauty we may judge for ourselves, as many portraits of her are extant, especially one of great excellence by Leonardo da Vinci, in the long gallery at Chenonceau.

Diane was soon forsaken, but the ready-witted lady consoled herself by laying siege to the heart of the son of Francis, Prince Henry, afterwards Henry II.

Henry surrendered at discretion. Nothing can more mark the freedom of the times than this *liaison*. Yet both these ladies—Diane de Poitiers and her successor in the favour of the King, the Duchesse d'Etampes—were constantly in the society of two most virtuous queens—Claude, and Elinor of Spain, the successive wives of Francis.

CHAPTER V.

ALL LOST SAVE HONOUR.

THE next scene is in Italy. The French army lies encamped on the broad plains of Lombardy, backed by snowy lines of Alpine fastnesses.

Bonnivet, in command of the French, presumptuous and inexperienced, has been hitherto defeated in every battle. Bourbon, fighting on the side of Spain, is, as before, victorious.

Francis, stung by the repeated defeat of his troops, has now joined the army, and commands in person. Milan, where the plague rages, has opened its gates to him; but Pavia, distant about twenty miles, is occupied by the Spaniards in force. Antonio De Leyva is governor. Thither the French advance in order to besiege the city.

The open country is defended by the Spanish forces under Bourbon. Francis, maddened by the presence of his cousin, rushes onward. Montmorenci and Bonnivet, flatterers both, assure

him that victory is certain by means of a *coup de main*.

It is night; the days are short, for it is February. The winter moon lights up the rich meadow lands divided by the broad Ticino and broken by the deep ditches and sluggish streams which surround the city. Tower, campanile, dome, and turret, with here and there the grim façade of a mediæval palace, stand out of the darkness.

Yonder among the meadows are the French, darkening the surrounding plain. Francis knows that the Constable is advancing to support the garrison of Pavia, and he desires to carry the city by assault before his arrival. Ever too rash, and now excited by a passionate sense of injury, Francis, with d'Alençon, De la Trémouille, De Foix, and Bonnivet, leads the attack at the head of his cavalry. Now he is under the very walls. Despite the dim moonlight, no one can mistake him. He wears a suit of steel armour inlaid with gold; a crimson surcoat, embroidered with gilt "F's;" a helmet encircled by a jewelled crown, out of which rises a yellow plume and golden salamander. For an instant success seems certain; the scaling-ladders thick with soldiers are already planted against the lowest walls, and

the garrison retreats under cover of the bastions. A sudden panic seizes the troops beneath who are to support the assault. In the treacherous moonlight they have fallen into confusion among the deep, slimy ditches; many are drifted away in the current of the great river. A murderous cannonade from the city walls now opens on the assailants and on the cavalry. Francis falls back. The older generals conjure him to retreat and raise the siege before the arrival of Bourbon, but, backed by Bonnivet and Montmorenci, he will not hear of it. The battle rages during the night. The morning light discovers the Spaniards commanded by Bourbon and Pescara, with the whole strength of their army, close under the walls. Again the King leads a fresh assault—a forlorn hope, rather. He fights desperately; the yellow plumes of his helmet wave hither and thither as his horse dashes wildly from side to side amidst the smoke, in the thickest of the battle. See, for an instant he falters,—he is wounded and bleeding. He recovers, however, and again clapping spurs to his horse, scatters his surrounding foes; six have already fallen by his hand. Look! his charger is pierced by a ball and falls with his rider. After a desperate struggle the King extricates himself; now

on foot, he still fights furiously. Alas! it is in vain. Every moment his enemies thicken around him, pressing closer and closer. His gallant followers drop one by one under the unerring aim of the Basque marksmen. La Trémouille has fallen. De Foix lies a corpse at his feet. Bonnivet in despair expiates his evil counsel by death.[1] Every shot takes from him one of the pillars of his throne. Francis flings himself wildly on the points of the Spanish pikes. The Royal Guards fall like summer grass before the sickle; but where the King stands, still dealing desperate blows, the bodies of the slain form a rampart of protection around him. His very enemies stand back amazed at such furious courage. While he struggles for his life hand to hand with d'Avila and d'Ovietta, plumeless, soiled and bloody, a loud cry rises from a thousand voices—"It is the King—LET HIM SURRENDER—*Capture the King!*" There is a dead silence; the Spanish troops fall back. A circle is formed round the now almost fainting Francis, who lies upon the blood-stained earth. De Pompérant advances. He kneels before the master whom he has betrayed, he implores him to yield to Bourbon.

At that hated name the King starts into fresh

[1] See Note 4.

fury; he grasps his sword, he struggles to his feet. "Never," cries he in a hoarse voice; "never will I surrender to that traitor! Rather let me die by the hand of a common marksman. Go back, Monsieur de Pompérant, and call to me the Vice-King of Naples."

Lannoy advances, kneels, and kisses his hand. "Your Majesty is my prisoner," he cries aloud, and a ringing shout is echoed from the Spanish troops.

Francis gives him his sword. Lannoy receives it kneeling, and replaces it by his own. The King's helmet is then removed; a velvet cap is given to him, which he places on his head. The Spanish and Italian troopers and the deadly musketeers silently creep round him where he lies on the grass, supported by cushions, one to tear a feather from his broken plume, another to cut a morsel from his surcoat as a relic. This involuntary homage from his enemies is evidently agreeable to Francis. As his surcoat rapidly disappears under the knives of his opponents, he smiles, and graciously acknowledges the rough advances of those same soldiers who a moment before thirsted for his blood. Other generals with Pescara advance and surround him. He courteously acknowledges their respectful salutations.

"Spare my poor soldiers, spare my Frenchmen, generals," he says.

These unselfish words bring tears into Pescara's eyes.

"Your Majesty shall be obeyed," replies he.

"I thank you," replies Francis with a faltering voice.

A pony is now brought to bear him into Pavia. Francis becomes greatly agitated. As they raise him up and assist him to mount, he turns to his escort of generals—

"Marquis," says he, turning to Pescara, "and you, my lord governor, if my calamity touches your hearts, as it would seem to do, I beseech you not to lead me into Pavia. I would not be exposed to the affront of entering as a prisoner a city I should have taken by assault. Carry me, I pray you, to some shelter without the walls."

"Your Majesty's wishes are our law," replies Pescara, saluting him. "We will bear you to the monastery of Saint-Paul, without the gate towards Milan."

To Saint-Paul the King was carried. It was from thence he wrote the historic letter to his mother, Louise de Savoie, Regent of France, in which he tells her, "*all is lost save honour.*"

CHAPTER VI.

BROKEN FAITH.

We are at Madrid. Francis has been lured hither by incredible treachery, under the idea that he will meet Charles V., and be at once set at liberty.

He is confined in one of the rooms of the Alcazar, then used as a state prison. A massive oaken door, clamped and barred with iron, opens from the court from whence a flight of steps leads into two small chambers which occupy one of the towers. The inner room has narrow windows, closely barred. The light is dim. There is just room for a table, two chairs, and a bed. It is a cage rather than a prison.

On a chair, near an open window, sits the King. He is emaciated and pale; his cheeks are hollow, his lips are white, his eyes are sunk in his head, his dress is neglected. His glossy hair,

plentifully streaked with grey, covers the hand upon which he wearily leans his head. He gazes vacantly at the setting sun opposite—a globe of fire rapidly sinking below the low dark plain which bounds his view.

There are boundless plains in front of him, and on his left a range of tawny hills. A roadway runs beneath the tower, where the Imperial Guards are encamped. The gay fanfare of the trumpets sounding the retreat, the waving banners, the prancing horses, the brilliant accoutrements, the glancing armour of the imperial troops, mock him where he sits. Around him is Madrid. Palace, tower, and garden rise out of a sea of buildings burnt by southern sunshine. The church bells ring out the Ave Maria. The fading light darkens into night. Still the King sits beside the open window, lost in thought. No one comes to disturb him. Now and then some broken words escape his lips:—"Save France—my poor soldiers—brave De Foix—noble Bonnivet—see, he is tossed on the Spanish pikes. Alas! would I were dead. My sister—my little lads—the Dauphin—Henry—Orleans—I shall never see you more. Oh, God! I am bound in chains of iron—France—liberty—glory—gone—gone for ever!" His head sinks on his breast; tears

stream from his eyes. He falls back fainting in his chair, and is borne to his bed.

Francis has never seen Charles, who is at his capital, Toledo. The Emperor does not even excuse his absence. This cold and cautious policy, this death in life, is agony to the ardent temperament of Francis. His health breaks down. A settled melancholy, a morbid listlessness overwhelms him. He is seized with fever; he rapidly becomes delirious. His royal gaoler, Charles, will not believe in his danger; he still refuses to see him. False himself, he believes Francis to be shamming. The Spanish ministers are distracted by their master's obstinacy, for if the French King dies at Madrid of broken heart, all is lost, and a bloody war with France inevitable.

At the moment when the Angel of Death hovers over the Alcazar, a sound of wheels is heard below. A litter, drawn by reeking mules and covered with mud, dashes into the street. The leather curtains are drawn aside, and Marguerite d'Alençon, pale and shrunk with anxiety and fatigue, attended by two ladies, having travelled from Paris day and night, descends. Breathless with excitement, she passes quickly up the narrow stairs, through the ante-room, and enters the King's

chamber. Alas! what a sight awaits her. Francis lies insensible on his bed. The room is darkened, save where a temporary altar has been erected, opposite his bed, on which lights are burning. A Bishop officiates. The low voices of priests, chanting as they move about the altar, alone break a death-like silence. Marguerite, overcome by emotion, clasps her hands and sinks on her knees beside her brother. Her sobs and cries disturb the solemn ordinance. She is led almost fainting away. Then the Bishop approaches the King, bearing the bread of life, and, at that moment, Francis becomes suddenly conscious. He opens his eyes, and in a feeble voice prays that he may be permitted to receive it. So humbly, yet so joyfully, does he communicate that all present are deeply moved.

In spite, however, of the presence of Marguerite in Madrid, the King relapses. He again falls into a death-like trance. Then, and then only, does the Emperor yield to the reproaches of the Duchesse d'Alençon and the entreaties of his ministers. He takes horse from Toledo and rides to Madrid almost without drawing rein, until he stops at the heavy door in the Alcazar. He mounts the stairs and enters the chamber. Francis, now restored to con-

sciousness, prompted by a too generous nature, opens his arms to embrace him.

"Your Majesty has come to see your prisoner die," says he in a feeble voice, faintly smiling.

"No," replies Charles, with characteristic caution and Spanish courtesy, bowing profoundly and kissing him on either cheek; "no, your Majesty will not die, you are no longer my prisoner; you are my friend and brother. I come to set you free."

"Ah, Sire," murmurs Francis in a voice scarcely audible, "death will accomplish that before your Majesty; but if I live—and indeed I do not believe I shall, I am so overcome by weakness—let me implore you to allow me to treat for my release in person with your Majesty; for this end I came hither to Madrid."

At this moment the conversation is interrupted by the entrance of a page, who announces to the Emperor that the Duchesse d'Alençon has arrived and awaits his Majesty's pleasure. Glad of an excuse to terminate a most embarrassing interview with his too confiding prisoner, Charles, who has been seated on the bed, rises hastily—

"Permit me, my brother," says he, "to leave

you, in order to descend and receive your august sister in person.* In the meantime recover your health. Reckon upon my willingness to serve you. Some other time we will meet; then we can treat more in detail of these matters, when your Majesty is stronger and better able to converse."

Charles takes an affectionate leave of Francis, descends the narrow stairs, and with much ceremony receives the Duchess.

"I rejoice, madame," says he, "to offer you in person the homage of all Spain, and my own hearty thanks for the courage and devotion you have shown in the service of the King, my brother. He is a prisoner no longer. The conditions of release shall forthwith be prepared by my ministers."

"Is the King fully aware what those conditions are, Sire?" Marguerite coldly asks.

Charles was silent.

"I fear our mother, Madame Louise, Regent of France," continues the Duchesse d'Alençon, "may find it difficult to accept your conditions, even though it be to liberate the Sovereign of France, her own beloved son."

"Madame," replies Charles evasively, "I will

not permit this occasion, when I have the happiness of first saluting you within my realm, to be occupied with state affairs. Rely on my desire to set my brother free. Meanwhile the King will, I hope, recover his strength. Pressing business now calls me back to Toledo. Adieu! most illustrious princess, to whom I offer all that Madrid contains for your service. Permit me to kiss your hands. Salute my brother, the King, from me. Once more, royal lady, adieu!"

Marguerite curtseys to the ground. The Emperor, with his head uncovered, mounts his horse, again salutes her, and attended by his retinue puts spurs to his steed and rides from the Alcazar on his return to Toledo. Marguerite fully understands the treachery of his words. Her heart swelling with indignation, she slowly ascends to the King's chamber.

"Has the Emperor departed already?" Francis eagerly asks her.

"Yes, my brother; pressing business, he says, calls him back to Toledo," replies Marguerite bitterly, speaking very slowly.

"What! gone so soon, before giving me an opportunity of discussing with him the terms of my freedom. Surely, my sister, this is strange," says

Francis, turning eagerly towards the Duchess, and then sinking back pale and exhausted on his pillows.

Marguerite seats herself beside him, takes his hand tenderly within both her own, and gazes at him in silence.

"But, my sister, did my brother, the Emperor, say *nothing* to you of his speedy return?"

"Nothing," answers Marguerite drily.

"Yet he assured me, with his own lips, that I was already free, and that the conditions of release would be prepared immediately."

"Dear brother," says the Duchess, "has your imprisonment at Madrid, and the conduct of the Emperor to you this long time past, inclined you to believe what he says?"

"I, a king myself, should be grieved to doubt a brother sovereign's word."

"Francis," says Marguerite, speaking with great earnestness and fixing her eyes on him, "what you say convinces me that you are weakened by illness. Your naturally acute intellect is dulled by the confusion of recent delirium. If you were in full possession of your senses you would not speak as you do. My brother, take heed of my words—you will never be free."

"How!" exclaims the King, starting up, "never be free? What do you mean?"

"Calm yourself, my brother. You are, I fear, too weak to hear what I have to say."

"No, no! my sister; suspense to me is worse than death. Speak to me, Marguerite; speak to me, my sister."

"Then, Sire, let me ask you, when you speak of release, when the Emperor tells you you are free, are you aware of the conditions he imposes on you?"

"Not accurately," replies Francis. "Certain terms were proposed, before my illness, that I should surrender whole provinces in France, renounce my rights in the Milanese, pay an enormous ransom, leave my sons hostages at Madrid; but these were the proposals of the Spanish council. The Emperor, speaking personally to a brother sovereign, would never press anything on me unbecoming my royal condition; therefore it is that I desire to treat with himself alone."

"Alas! my brother, you are too generous; you are deceived. Much negotiation has passed during your illness, and since my arrival. Conditions have been proposed by Spain to the Regent, that she—your mother—supported by the parliament of

your country, devoted to your person, has refused. Listen to me, Francis. Charles seeks to dismember France. As long as it remains a kingdom, he intends that you shall never leave Madrid."

"Marguerite, my sister, proceed, I entreat you!" breaks in Francis, trembling with excitement.

"Burgundy is to be ceded; you are to renounce all interest in Flanders and in the Milanese. You are to pay a ransom that will beggar the kingdom. You are to marry Elinor, Queen Dowager of Portugal, sister to Charles, and you are to leave your sons, the Dauphin and the Duc d'Orléans, hostages in Spain for the fulfilment of these demands."

Francis turns very white, and sinks back speechless on the pillows that support him. He stretches out his arm to his sister and fondly clasps her neck. "Marguerite, if it is so, you say well,—I shall never leave Madrid. My sister, let me die ten thousand deaths rather than betray the honour of France."

"Speak not of death, dearest brother!" exclaims Marguerite, her face suddenly flushing with excitement. "I have come to make you live. I, Marguerite d'Alençon, your sister, am come to lead you back to your army and to France; to the France

that mourns for you; to the army that is now dispersed and insubordinate; to the mother who weeps for her beloved son." Marguerite's voice falters; she sobs aloud, and rising from her chair, she presses her brother in her arms. Francis feebly returns her embrace, tenderly kisses her, and signs to her to proceed. "Think you," continues Marguerite more calmly, and reseating herself, but still holding the King's hand—"think you that councils in which *Bourbon* has a voice——" At this name the King shudders and clenches his fist upon the bed-clothes. "Think you that a sovereign who has treacherously lured you to Madrid will have any mercy on you? No, my brother; unless you agree to unworthy conditions, imposed by a treacherous monarch who abuses his power over you, here you will languish until you die! Now mark my words, dear brother. Treaties made under *duresse*, by *force majeure*, are legally void. You will dissemble, my generous King—for the sake of France, you will dissemble. You must fight this crafty emperor with his own weapons."

"What! my sister, be false to my word—I, a belted knight, invested by the hands of Bayard on the field of Marignano, stoop to a lie? Marguerite, you are mad!"

"Oh, Francis, hear me!" cries Marguerite passionately, "hear me; on my knees I conjure you to live, for yourself, for us, for France." She casts herself on the floor beside him. She wrings his hands, she kisses his feet, her tears falling thickly. "Francis, you must, you shall consent. By-and-by you will bless me for this tender violence. You are not fit to meddle in this matter. Leave to me the care of your honour; is it not my own? I come from the Regent, from the council, from all France. Believe me, brother, if you are perjured, all Europe will applaud the perjury."

Marguerite, whose whole frame quivers with agitation, speaks no more. There is a lengthened pause. The flush of fever is on the King's face.

"My sister," murmurs Francis, struggling with a broken voice under the influence of deep emotion to express himself, "you have conquered. Into your hands I commit my honour and the future of France. Leave me a while to rest, for I am faint."

Treaties made under *duresse* by *force majeure* are legally void. The Emperor must be decoyed into the belief that terms are accepted by Francis, which are to be broken the instant his foot touches French soil. It is with the utmost

difficulty that the chivalrous monarch can be brought to lend himself to this deceit. But the prayers of his sister, the deplorable condition of his kingdom deprived of his presence for nearly five years, the terror of returning illness, and the thorough conviction that Charles is as perfidious as he is ambitious, at length prevail. Francis ostensibly accepts the Emperor's terms, and Queen Claude being dead, he affiances himself to Charles' sister, Elinor, Queen Dowager of Portugal.

Francis was perjured, but France was saved.

CHAPTER VII.

LA DUCHESSE D'ETAMPES.

Riding with all speed from Madrid — for he fears the Emperor's perfidy—Francis has reached the frontier of Spain, on the banks of the river Bidassoa. His boys—the Dauphin and the Duc d'Orléans, who are to replace him at Madrid as hostages — await him there. They rush into their father's arms and fondly cling to him, weeping bitterly at this cruel meeting for a moment after years of separation. Francis, with ready sympathy, mingles his tears with theirs. He embraces and blesses them. But, wild with the excitement of liberty and insecure while on Spanish soil, he cannot spare time for details. He hands the poor lads over to the Spanish commissioners. Too impatient to await the arrival of the ferry boat, which is pulling across the river, he steps into the waters of the Bidassoa to meet it. On the opposite bank, among the low scrub wood,

a splendid retinue awaits him. He springs into the saddle, waves his cap in the air, and with a joyous shout exclaims, "Now I am a king! Now I am free!"

The political vicissitudes of Francis's reign are as nothing to the chaos of his private life; only as a lover he was never defeated. No humiliating Pavia arrests his successful course. At Bayonne he finds a brilliant Court; his mother the Regent, and his sister Marguerite, awaiting his arrival. After "Les embrasseurs d'usage," as Du Bellay quaintly expresses it, the King's eye wanders over the parterre of young beauties assembled in their suite, "la petite bande des dames de la Cour." Then Francis first beholds Anne de Pisselieu, afterwards Duchesse d'Etampes. No one can compare to her in the tyranny of youth, beauty, and talent. A mere girl, she already knows everything, and is moreover astute, witty, and false. In spite of the efforts of Diane de Poitiers to attract the King (she having come to Bayonne in attendance on the Regent-mother), Anne de Pisselieu prevails. The King is hers. He delights in her joyous sallies. Anne laughs at every one and everything, specially at the pretensions of Madame Diane, whom she calls "an old hag." She declares

that she herself was born on Diane's wedding-day!

Who can resist so bewitching a creature? Not Francis certainly. So the Court divides itself into two factions in love, politics, and religion. One party, headed by the Duchesse d'Etampes—a Protestant, and mistress of the reigning monarch; a second by Madame Diane de Poitiers—a Catholic, who, after many efforts, finding the King inaccessible, devotes herself to his son, Prince Henry, a mere boy, at least twenty years younger than herself, and waits his reign. Oddly enough, it is the older woman who waits, and the younger one who rules.

The Regent-mother looks on approvingly. Morals, especially royal morals, do not exist. Madame Louise de Savoie is ambitious. She would not see the new Spanish Queen—a comely princess, as she hears from her daughter Marguerite—possess too much influence over the King. It might injure her own power. The poor Spanish Queen! No fear that her influence will injure any one! The King never loves her, and never forgives her being forced upon him as a clause in the ignominious treaty of Madrid. Besides, she is thirty-two years old and a widow; grave, dignified, and

learned, but withal a lady of agreeable person, though of mature and well-developed charms. Elinor admired and loved Francis when she saw him at Madrid, and all the world thought that the days were numbered in which Madame d'Etampes would be seen at Court. "But," says Du Bellay, either with perfect naiveté or profound irony—"it was impossible for the King to offer to the virtuous Spanish princess any other sentiments than respect and gratitude, the Duchesse d'Etampes being sole mistress of his heart!" So the royal lady fares no better than Queen Claude, "with the roses in her soul," and only receives, like her, courtesy and indifference.

The King returns to the Spanish frontier to receive Queen Elinor and to embrace the sons, now released, to whom she has been a true mother during the time they have been hostages at Madrid.

By-and-by the Queen's brother—that mighty and perfidious sovereign, Charles V., Emperor of Germany—passing to his estates in the Netherlands, "craves leave of his beloved brother, Francis, King of France, to traverse his kingdom on his way," so great is his dread of the sea voyage on account of sickness.

Some days before the Emperor's arrival Francis

is at the Louvre. He has repaired and embellished it in honour of his guest, and has pulled down the central tower, or donjon, called "Philippine," which encumbered the inner court. By-and-by he will pull down all the mediæval fortress, and, assisted by Lescot, begin the palace known as the "Old Louvre."

Francis is seated tête-à-tête with the Duchesse d'Etampes. The room is small—a species of boudoir or closet. It is hung with rare tapestry, representing in glowing colours the Labours of Hercules. Venetian mirrors, in richly carved frames, fling back the light of a central chandelier, also of Venetian workmanship, cunningly wrought into gaudy flowers, diamonded pendants and true lovers' knots. It is a blaze of brightness and colour. Rich velvet hangings, heavy with gold embroidery, cover the narrow windows and hang over the low doors. The King and the Duchess sit beside a table of inlaid marble, supported on a pedestal, marvellously gilt, of Italian workmanship, on which are laid fruits, wines, and *confitures*, served in golden vessels worked in the Cinque-cento style, after Cellini's patterns. Beside themselves, Triboulet,[1] the king's fool, alone is present. As Francis

[1] See Note 5.

holds out his cup time after time to Triboulet, who replenishes it with Malvoisie, the scene composes itself into a perfect picture, such as Victor Hugo has imagined in *Le Roi s'amuse;* so perfect, indeed, that Francis might have sung, "La donna è mobile," as he now does in Verdi's opera of *Rigoletto.*

"Sire," says the Duchess, her voice dropping into a most delicious softness, "do you leave us to-morrow?"

The King bows his head and kisses her jewelled fingers.

"So you persist in going to meet your brother, the Emperor Charles, your loving brother of Spain; whom I hate because he was so cruel to you at Madrid." The Duchess looks up and smiles. Her eyes are beautiful, but hard and cruel. She wears an ermine mantle, for it is winter; her dress is of the richest green satin, embroidered with gold. On her head is a golden net, the meshes sprinkled with diamonds, from which her dark tresses escape in long ringlets over her shoulders.

Francis turns towards her and pledges her in a cup of Malvoisie. The corners of his mouth are drawn up into a cynical smile, almost to his nostrils. He has now reached middle life, and his

face at that time would have made no man's fortune.

"Duchess," says he, "I must tear myself from you. I go to-morrow to Touraine. Before returning to Paris, I shall attend my brother the Emperor Charles at Loches, then at Amboise on the Loire. You will soon follow me with the Queen."

"And, surely, when you have this heartless king, this cruel gaoler in your power, you will punish him and revenge yourself? If he, like a fool, comes into Touraine, make him revoke the treaty of Madrid, or shut him up in one of Louis XI.'s oubliettes at Amboise or Loches."

"I will *persuade* him if I can to liberate me from all the remaining conditions of the treaty," said the King, "but I will never *force* him." As he speaks, Triboulet, who has been shaking the silver bells on his parti-coloured dress with suppressed laughter, pulls out some ivory tablets to add something to a list he keeps of those whom he considers greater fools than himself. He calls it "his journal."

The King looks at the tablets and sees the name of Charles V.

"Ha! ha! by the mass!—how long has my brother of Spain figured there?" asks he.

"The day, Sire, that I heard he had put his foot on the French frontier."

"What will you do when I let him depart freely?"

"I shall," said Triboulet, "rub out his name and put yours in its place, Sire."

"See, your Majesty, there is some one else who agrees with me," says the Duchess, laughing.

"I know," replies Francis, "that my interests would almost force me to do as you desire, madame, but my honour is dearer to me than my interests. I am now at liberty,—I had rather the treaty of Madrid should stand for ever than countenance an act unworthy of 'un roi chevalier.'"

Francis receives Charles V. at Amboise with ostentatious splendour. Aware of the repugnance of his royal guest to mount steps (the Spanish Emperor was early troubled by those attacks of gout that caused him at length to abdicate and to die of premature old age, at the monastery of San Juste), Francis caused an inclined plane or slope to be constructed in place of stairs within one of the round towers by which the Castle of Amboise, standing on a precipitous pile of rocks, is approached. Up this slope, which remains in excellent preservation, Charles ascends to the plateau on which the castle stands, seated in his ponderous

coach, drawn by heavy horses, attended by guards and outriders. Elinor, his sister, the neglected Queen, as well as the favourite, Madame d'Etampes, are present at the fêtes given in honour of the Emperor. There are no secrets at Court, and Charles soon comes to know that the *maîtresse en titre* is his enemy. One evening, after a dance executed by Anne d'Etampes along with the ladies of the Court, in which she displayed the graces of her person, the Emperor approaches her.

"Madame," he says, "it is only in France that I have seen such perfection of elegance and beauty. My brother, the King, would be the envy of all the sovereigns of Europe could they have witnessed what I have just seen. There is no ransom that I would accept for such a captive, had I the power of retaining her at Madrid."

The Emperor's eyes melt with admiration as he gazes on her.

The Duchess's countenance beams with delight at the Emperor's high-flown compliment.

The King approaches the spot where they stand.

"Know, my brother," says the King with a slight touch of irony in his tone, for he is displeased at the tender glances Charles is casting on his favourite, "know that this fair Duchess

would have had me detain you here a prisoner until you had revoked the treaty of Madrid."

The Emperor starts visibly and frowns. "If you consider the advice good, your Majesty had better follow it," he replies haughtily, turning away to address some nobles standing near.

Some few days afterwards the Duchess gives a supper in her apartments, to which the Emperor and the Court are invited. After the reception, sinking on her knees, she presents his Majesty with rose water in a gold embossed basin in which to wash his hands. Charles adroitly drops a large diamond ring into the basin. The Duchess stoops and places the vessel on the ground in order to pick up the jewel.

"This ring, madame," he says, and he speaks low, and leans forward in order to catch her ear, "is too becoming to that fair hand for me to remove it. It has itself sought a new possessor," and he kisses her hand. "Keep it as a pledge of my admiration and my friendship."

The Duchess rises and makes a deep obeisance. Not only did she keep the ring, but she became so decided a partisan of this "*gaoler*," that she is popularly accused of having betrayed Francis to the Emperor; specially in the subsequent wars between England, France, and Spain.

CHAPTER VIII.

LAST DAYS.

RAMBOUILLET is now a station on the railway between Versailles, Chartres, and Le Mans. It is a sunny little town, sloping to the south, in a sheltered hollow, over which the slanting roofs and conical turrets of the palace rise out of stately elms and spiked poplars. The principal façade of the château—which consists of two wings at right angles to each other, having at each corner a circular turret, surmounted by a spire—faces the mid-day sun. The ground lies low, and canals, extending in three directions, bordered by terraced walks and avenues, intersect the grassy lawns which lengthen into the tangled woodland of the surrounding forest. Opposite the château, on an islet, is a grotto called "La Marmite de Rabelais." To the right, the three canals flow into a river, spanned by a low bridge, known as "the accursed

bridge," from some now obscure tradition foreboding evil to those who pass over it. On every other side, the trunks of venerable trees, their over-arching branches closing above like a cloister —pillars of oak, elm, and ash—wind away into grassy meads and shady dingles, intersected by long rides cut straight through the forest, proper for the stag-hunts which have been held in this ancient manor since the Middle Ages.

The château itself has been modernised, save where one ivy-crowned round tower (the donjon of the mediæval fortress), in deep shadow, frowns an angry defiance to the stucco and whitewash of the flimsy modern façade.

[redacted] is the month of March, in the year 1547. [redacted]cis, attended by a small retinue, has arrived [redacted]e foot of this round tower. Coming from the [redacted] he has crossed the river by "the accursed [redacted]."

During the whole past year he has wandered from place to place, revisiting all his favourite haunts as though conscious that he was bidding them farewell. The restlessness of mortal disease is upon him. Though he flies from city to hamlet, from castle to palace, vainly seeking respite from pain, death haunts and follows him. His life is

agony. He is greatly changed—an internal fever consumes him. His eyes are haggard; his face is thin, and his body emaciated. Only fifty-two years old, like his great rival the Emperor Charles, he is prematurely aged. Now he is half lifted from his coach and slowly led up a winding staircase to his apartments on the second floor by his friend James d'Angennes, to whose ancestors Rambouillet belonged. Francis comes from Chambord, where Marguerite, now Queen of Navarre by her second marriage, met him. Marguerite and her brother still cling to each other, but they are both aged and full of care. Her beauty is faded and her health is broken. Even she, though devoted as ever, can[illegible] amuse Francis or dissipate the weight that oppr[illegible] his spirit. The old topics that were wont to de[illegible] him are irritably dismissed. He no longer [illegible] for poetry, is wearied of politics, shrinks [illegible] society, and abuses women. It is at this ti[illegible] writes with the point of a diamond, on the window of his closet at Chambord, these significant lines:—

"Souvent femme varie;
Mal habile qui s'y fie!"

He can only talk to his sister on sorrowful subjects: of the death by plague of his favourite son Charles, who caught the infection when sleeping

at Abbeville; or of his old friend, Henry VIII. of England, who has also recently died.

The death of the latter seems to affect Francis terribly: — "Our lives," he says, "were very similar—he was slightly older, but I shall not long survive him." Vainly does Marguerite combat these dismal forebodings. She laments in secret the sad change. Ever sympathetic with her brother, she, too, throws aside romance and poetry and composes "The Mirror of a Sinful Soul" to suit his altered humour. Alas! what would Marguerite say if she knew what is carefully concealed from her? That the great surgeon Paré—Paré, who was afterwards to draw the spear-point from the cheek of the Balafré—has pronounced that the King's malady is hopeless!

After a short sojourn together at Chambord, the brother and sister part never to meet again.

Francis was to have passed the carnival at Limours, says Du Bellay; now he commands the masked balls and the court ballets to be held at Saint-Germain en Laye. The King's fancy changes: he will rouse himself; he will shake off the horrible lethargy that is creeping over him; he will dismiss sinister presentiments. Disguised himself, he will dance among the maskers—the excitement will revive him.

But strong as is his will, high as is his courage, the mortal disease within him is stronger still. Suddenly he countermands all his orders. He will rather go to Rambouillet to visit his old friend, d'Angennes; to meet Rabelais perhaps, who loves the old castle, and to hunt in the great woods.

The quiet old manor, half hunting-lodge, half fortress, buried in secluded woods just bursting into leaf, where the wild boar and the stag are plentiful, will suit him better than banquets, balls, games, and boisterous revelry. The once dauntless Francis is grown nervous and querulous, and is painfully conscious of the slightest noise. After a rapid journey he crosses the ill-omened bridge and arrives at Rambouillet. No sooner has he been laid in his bed than again his mind changes. He must rise and go to Saint-Germain, more suitable than Rambouillet in accommodation for his present condition. But the intense anguish he suffers renders this project impossible. Well, he will remain. He will rest one night here; then, he will depart. In the morning, says the same historian, he awakes at daylight, feeling somewhat better. He commands a royal hunt for stags and boars. Once more he hears the bugle of the huntsmen, the baying of the hounds, the tramp of

the impatient steeds. The fresh morning air gives him fictitious strength. He rises from his bed, dresses himself, descends, forces himself on horseback and rides forth, defying disease and pain. Alas! he is soon brought back to the donjon tower and carried up the stairs speechless and in mortal agony to his bed. Fever and delirium ensue, but as the death shadows gather round him weakness clears his brain.

"I am dying," says he faintly, addressing d'Angennes, who never leaves him for an instant; "send for my son Henry."

"Sire," replies the Count, "his Highness is already here."

"Let him come to me at once; my breath fails me fast."

The Prince enters and kneels beside the dying king. He weeps bitterly, takes his father's already cold hand in his own and kisses it. Francis feebly returns the pressure. He turns his sunken eyes towards his son and signs that he would speak. Henry, the better to catch his words, rises and bends over him.

"My son, I have been a great sinner," falters the dying King, "my passions led me astray; avoid this, Henry. If I have done well, follow that, not the evil."

"Sire," replies the Prince, "we all love and honour your Majesty."

"Cherish France, my son," continues the King; "it is a noble nation. They refused me nothing in my adversity, nor will they you, if you rule them rightly. Lighten the taxes, my son,—be good to my people."

His voice grows fainter and less distinct, his face more ashen.

The Prince, seeing his lips move but hearing no sound, lays his ear close to his father's mouth.

"Commend me to Catherine, your wife; beware of the Guises; they will strip you; they are all traitors;[1] cherish my people." He spoke no more.

The Prince motions to d'Angennes, and the parish priest with his acolytes enter, bearing the Host. Speechless, but conscious, with a look of infinite devotion, Francis receives the sacraments. Then, turning his dying eyes towards his son, he feebly raises his hands to bless him.

Henry, overcome by the sight of his dying father, sinks prostrate beside the bed. D'Angennes stands at the head, supporting his dying master in his arms; while he wipes the moisture from his forehead, Francis expires.

[1] See Note 6.

CHAPTER IX.

CATHERINE DE MEDICI.

CATHERINE DE MEDICI, widow of Henry II., and mother of three kings regnant, rules France in their name. Her father, Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, second tyrant of Florence, died before she was born; her mother, Madaleine de la Tour d'Auvergne (for Catherine had French blood in her veins), died when she was born; so fatal was this Medici, even at her birth.

The *Duchessina*, as Catherine was called, was reared by her aunt Clarice Sforza, within the mediæval stronghold of the Medici at Florence—now known as the Riccardi Palace. Although bereft of palisade and towers of defence, it is still a stately pile of Italian Gothic architecture, with pillared cortile, ornate front, and sculptured cornice, bidding a mute defiance to the encroachments of the modern buildings of the Via Cavour, the Corso of the City of Flowers.

Catherine was educated by the nuns of the "Murate" (walled up), in their convent near the Porto Santa Croce. The teaching of these lonely enthusiasts strangely contrasted with the life she afterwards led in the Florentine Court—a very hot-bed of vice, intrigue, and ambition. There did this Medea of the Cinque-cento learn how to dissimulate and to betray. At fifteen she became, by the favour of her uncle, Pope Clement VII., the richest heiress in Europe. She was tall and finely formed, of a clear olive complexion (inherited from her French mother), with well-cut features, and large prominent eyes, like all the Medici. Her manners were gracious, her countenance expressive, but there was, even in extreme youth, a fixed and cold expression on the statuesque face that belied these pleasant attributes. Many suitors sought her hand, but Clement VII., outraged at the brutality of the Spanish coalition against him under Charles V., which had resulted in the sack of Rome and his own imprisonment in the Castle of St. Angelo, was glad to spite his enemies by bestowing his wealthy niece on the Duc d'Orléans, son of Francis I. As the heiress of the Medici came of a republican race of merchant princes, mere mushrooms beside the lofty antiquity

of the Valois line, the Pope, to give greater lustre to the espousals, announced that he would himself conduct his niece to her future husband. At Leghorn, Catherine embarked with her uncle in a sumptuous papal galley, attended by his tonsured Court. A flotilla of boats accompanied the vice-regent of God upon earth and his niece the sparkling *Duchessina*. Fair winds and smooth seas soon wafted them to the French shore, where Francis and his sons awaited their arrival at Marseilles.

Francis, says Brantôme, was so charmed with the Medici bride, her intelligence and lively manners, that he romped with her the entire evening after her arrival. When Francis found that she danced admirably, that she shot with an arquebuse like a trooper, played at maille like a boy, and rode boldly and gracefully, his partiality to his new daughter-in-law knew no bounds. What was the opinion of the bridegroom Orléans, and what comparison he made between a bride of fifteen and a mistress of thirty-five, is not recorded. There was nearly twenty years difference in age between Prince Henry, Duc d'Orléans, a mere boy, and Diane de Poitiers, yet her influence over him was still absolute. To the day of his death he wore her colours—white and black—upon his

shield. Diane, secure in power, was rather proud of her age. She boasted to the new Duchess that she was never ill, that she rose at six o'clock in the morning, bathed in the coldest water, and rode two hours before breakfast.

When Catherine first appeared at the Louvre as the bride of Prince Henry, she *seemed* but a clever, facile girl, ready to accept her humiliating position as subordinate in power, influence, and beauty to her husband's mistress, Diane de Poitiers, as well as to the Duchesse d'Etampes, the favourite of Francis. Placed among these two women and the lonely Spanish Queen, Elinor of Portugal, for fourteen years she acquitted herself with the most perfect temper and discretion. Indeed, with strange self-command in one so young, she endeavoured to flatter both the favourites, but failing to propitiate either Diane or the Duchess, and not being able to attract her husband or to interest the sedate Spaniard, she devoted herself wholly to charm her father-in-law, Francis. She became the constant and beloved companion of his various progresses and hunting parties to Fontainebleau, Amboise, Chenonceau, and Loches. No court pageants these, on ambling pads over smooth lawns, among limber trees, with retinue of velvet-liveried menials on the

watch for any possible casualty; but hard and dangerous riding in search of boars, and wolves, and stags, over a rough country, among thick underwood, rocky hills, and precipitous uplands.

Thus Catherine *seemed*, but in her heart she despised the Duchess, abhorred Diane, and suffered all the mortification of a neglected wife. Diane did not moreover spare her feelings, but insolently and ostentatiously paraded her superior influence, especially after Prince Henry came to the throne and created her Duchesse de Valentinois.

Catherine, however, with marvellous self-command bore all meekly, brought the King ten children, and for fourteen years bided her time. And that time came sooner than either the wife or the mistress expected.

CHAPTER X.

A FATAL JOUST.

It is the wedding-day of the two princesses, Elizabeth and Marguerite; the first a daughter, the latter a sister, of Henry II. A tournament is to be held in the Rue Saint-Antoine, near the Palace des Tournelles, so called from its many towers.[1]

King Henry and the elder princes, his sons, are to ride in the lists and to break a lance freely with all comers. Queen Catherine and the brides—Elizabeth, the very youthful wife of the morose Philip II. of Spain, lately husband of Mary Tudor, known as Bloody Mary, now deceased; Marguerite, wife of the Duke of Savoy, and Marguerite de Valois, second daughter of Catherine, then but a child—are seated in the centre of an open dais covered with damascened silk, and ornamented with feathers, tassels, and gaudy streamers, which flutter in the summer breeze. Behind them are ranged

[1] See Note 7.

the greatest ladies of the Court, among whom Diane de Poitiers, now Duchesse de Valentinois, occupies the place of honour. The ladies in waiting on the Queen and the great officers of state are ranged at the back.

It is a lovely morning in the month of July. The summer sun lights up the gay dresses and fair faces of the Court into a glowing parterre of bright colours. At a signal from Queen Catherine bands of wind instruments burst into martial music; the combatants enter the arena and divide themselves into different squadrons. First rides the King at the head of his knights. His appearance is the signal for all to rise, as much out of respect to him as the better to observe his chivalrous bearing and magnificent accoutrements. He wears a suit of armour in which gold is the chief metal. His sword-handle and dagger are set with jewels, and from his shield and lance fly streamers of black and white—the colours of Diane de Poitiers. He rides a Spanish barb, caparisoned with crimson velvet, that tosses his head and curvets proudly, as if conscious of its royal burden. Three times the King passes round the list within the barriers, preceded by pages and esquires bearing shields bound

with ribbons, on which are engraven, in letters of gold or of gems, the initials of their masters' ladye-loves. The King is followed by squadrons of knights, who all range themselves near the open dais occupied by the queens and the princesses.

A herald in a parti-coloured dress advances into the centre of the open space, and to the sound of trumpet proclaims that the lists are open. The barriers are then lowered by the pages and the esquires, and the tilting begins.

Catherine looks on with a troubled countenance. Her eyes incessantly follow the King and watch his every movement. As knight after knight is unhorsed and rolls in the dust, and loud cries and shouts of laughter rise at each discomfiture above the tumult of the fight, the anxious expression on her face never changes. Now and then, when the King, excited by the mimic warfare, deals and receives hard blows and vigorous lance thrusts, Catherine visibly trembles. Like the wife of Pilate, "she has suffered much because of a dream concerning him"—a dream that has shown him to her, disfigured and dabbled with blood, lying dead in a strange chamber.

In the early morning she had implored the King not to enter the lists, but Henry had

laughed and had ridden forth wearing the colours of her rival.

Now the long day is drawing to a close; the sun is low on the horizon and the tournament is over. The King, who has fought like a son of Francis I., and broken the lances of the Ducs de Ferrara, Guise, and Nemours, has retired from the lists into his tent to unarm. The young princes have dismounted and ascended into the dais beside their mother and the brides. Catherine breathes again; the King is safe—her dream but the coinage of her brain! But hark! the faint sound of a trumpet is heard, proceeding from the extremity of the long street of Saint-Antoine. The Queen grows pale and bends her ear to listen. The sound comes nearer; it becomes more distinct at each fresh blast. Now it is at hand, and as the shrill and ill-omened notes strike her ear, a herald advances preceded by a trumpeter, and announces that a masked knight has arrived and challenges his Majesty to break a lance with him in honour of his lady.

The masked knight, habited entirely in black armour, rides into the arena. Certain of the fatal event, the Queen rises suddenly from her seat. Her countenance expresses absolute terror.

She beckons hastily to the Comte d'O, who is in attendance. "Go," says she in a low voice, speaking rapidly; "go at once to the King. Tell him that if he fights with this stranger he will die!—tell him so from me. Haste! for the love of the Virgin, haste!"

No sooner has the Comte d'O left her, than, leaning over the dais, Catherine, with clasped hands and eager eyes, watches him as he crosses the enclosure. She sees him parley with the King, who is replacing his casque and arranging his armour. Henry laughs. The Queen turns to the young Comte de la Molle, who is near—"Call up hither his Majesty to me instantly. Tell him he must come up to me here before he enters the lists. It is for life or death—the life of the King. Go! fly!"

This second messenger crosses to where Henry is just mounting on horseback. "Alas! alas! he does not heed my messenger. Let me go," cries the Queen in the most violent agitation; "I will myself descend and speak with his Majesty." She rushes forward through the astonished courtiers to where a flight of steps leads below into the enclosure. As her foot is on the topmost stair, she sees the King gallop forth, fully equipped, in face of the

masked knight. The Queen is ashy pale, her large eyes are fixed on the King, her white lips tremble. She stands motionless, supported by the balustrade. Her daughters, the brides, and her ladies, gather round her full of wonder. By a great effort she masters her agitation, and slowly turns back into a retiring-room behind the dais, and seats herself on a chair of state. Then with solemn gesture she addresses herself to the princesses—

"Elizabeth, my daughter, and you, Marguerite, come hither. My sons, Francis and Charles, come to me all of you quickly." At her invitation they assemble round her in astonishment. "Alas! my children, you are all orphans and I am a widow. I have seen it. It is true. Now, while I speak, the lance is pointed that will pierce the King. Your father must die, my children. I know it and I cannot save him."

While they all press with pitying looks around her, trying to console yet unable to comprehend her meaning, she slowly rises. "Let us, my children," says she in a hollow voice, "pray for the King's soul." She casts herself on the ground and folds her hands in silent prayer. Her children kneel around her. There is a great silence.

Then a loud cry is heard from below—"The King is wounded; the King is unhorsed; the King bleeds; *en avant* to the King!" Catherine rises. She is calm now and perfectly composed. She approaches the wooden steps leading into the arena below. There she sees, stretched on the ground, the King insensible, his face bathed in blood, pierced in the eye by the lance of the masked knight who has fled. Henry is mortally wounded, and is borne, as the Queen saw in her dream, into a strange chamber in the Palace des Tournelles, hard by. After some days of horrible agony he expires, aged forty-one. The masked knight struck but a random blow, and was held innocent of all malice. He was the Sieur de Montgomeri, ancestor of the present Earls of Eglinton.

CHAPTER XI.

THE WIDOWED QUEEN.

Even while the King lay dying, Catherine gave a taste of her vindictive character by ordering Diane de Poitiers instantly to quit the Louvre; to deliver up the crown jewels; and to make over the possession of the Château of Chenonceau, in Touraine, to herself. Chenonceau was Catherine's "Naboth's vineyard." From a girl, when she had often visited it in company with her father-in-law, Francis, she had longed to possess this lovely woodland palace, beside the clear waters of the river Cher. To her inexpressible disgust, her husband, when he became King, presented it to "the old hag," Diane, Duchesse de Valentinois.

When Diane, sitting lonely at the Louvre, for Henry II. was dying at the Palace des Tournelles, received the Queen's message, she turned indignantly to the messenger and angrily asked, "Is the King then dead?" "No, madame, but his

wound is pronounced mortal; he cannot last out the day."

"Tell the Queen," said Diane haughtily, "that her reign has not yet begun. I am mistress over her and the kingdom as long as the King lives. If he dies I care little how much she insults me. I shall be too wretched even to heed her."

As Regent, Catherine's real character appeared. She revelled in power. Gifted with a masculine understanding and a thorough aptitude for state business, she was also inscrutable, stern, and cruel. She believed in no one, and had faith in nothing save the prediction of astrologers and the course of the stars, to which she gave unquestioning belief. As in the days of her girlhood, Catherine (always armed with a concealed dagger, its blade dipped in poison) traded on the weaknesses of those around her. She intrigued when she could not command, and fascinated the victim she dared not attack. All who stood in the way of her ambition were "*removed*." None can tell how many she hurried to an untimely grave. The direful traditions of her race, the philters, the perfumes, the powders, swift and deadly poisons, were imported by her into France. Her cunning hands could infuse death into the fairest and the freshest flowers.

She had poisons for gloves and handkerchiefs, for the folds of royal robes, for the edge of gemmed drinking cups, for rich and savoury dishes. She stands accused of having poisoned the Queen of Navarre, mother of Henry IV.,[1] in a pair of gloves; and, spite of the trial and execution of Sebastian Montecucolli, she was held guilty of having compassed the death of her brother-in-law, the Dauphin, in a cup of water, thus opening the throne for her husband and herself.

Within her brain, fertile in evil, was conceived the massacre of St. Bartholomew—to exceed the horrors of the Sicilian Vespers under John of Procida—the plan of which she discussed years before the event with Philip II. and his minister, the Duke of Alva, whom she met at Bayonne, when she visited there her daughter, Elizabeth of Spain. Catherine was true to no party and faithful to no creed. During her long government she cajoled alike Catholics and Protestants. She balanced Guise against Coligni, and Condé against Navarre, as suited her immediate purpose. Provided the end she proposed was attained, she cared nothing for the means. Although attached to her children in infancy, before supreme

[1] See Note 8.

power had come within her grasp, she did not hesitate to sacrifice them, later, to her political intrigues.

For her youngest daughter — the bewitching Marguerite, frail Queen of Navarre—she cared not at all. Her autobiography is filled with details of her mother's falseness and unkindness. As to her sons, all—save Francis, who died at eighteen—were initiated early into vice. Their hands were soon red with blood. Long before they reached manhood they were steeped in debauchery and left the cares of government entirely to their mother. Her Court — an oasis of delight and artistic repose, in an age of bloodshed (for Catherine was a true Medici, and loved artists and the arts, splendour and expenditure)—was as fatal as the gardens of Armida to virtue, truth, and honour. She surrounded herself with dissipated nobles, subservient courtiers, venal nymphs, and impure enchantresses, all ready to barter their souls and bodies in the service of their Queen. The names of the forty noble demoiselles by whom Catherine was always attended, are duly recorded by Brantôme.

"Know, my cousin," said the Queen, speaking to the Duc de Guise, "that my maids of honour are the best allies of the royal cause."

She imported ready-witted Italians, actors and singers, who played at a theatre within the Hôtel Bourbon at Paris; saltimbanques and rope-dancers, who paraded the streets; astrologers, like Ruggiero; jewellers, like Zametti; and bankers, like Gondi. These men were ready to sell themselves for any infamy; to call on the stars for confirmation of their prophecies; to tempt spendthrift princes with ample supply of ready cash; to insinuate themselves into the confidence of unwary nobles; all to serve their royal mistress as spies.

A woman of such powerful mind, infinite resource, and unscrupulous will, overawed and oppressed her children. During the three successive reigns of her sons, Francis II., Charles IX., and Henry III., Catherine ruled with the iron hand of a mediæval despot. Yet her cruelty, perfidy, and statescraft, were worse than useless. She lived to see the chivalric race of Valois degraded; her favourite child, Anjou, Henry III., driven like a dog from Paris, by Henri de Guise; and son after son go down childless to a dishonoured grave.

CHAPTER XII.

MARY STUART AND HER HUSBAND.

FRANCIS II., aged sixteen, eldest son of Henry II., is nominally King of France. He is gentle and affectionate (strange qualities for a son of Catherine), well principled, and not without understanding. Born with a feeble constitution and badly educated, he lacks vigour both of mind and body to grasp the reins of government in a period so stormy —a period when Guise is at variance with Condé, and the nation is distracted between Catholic and Protestant intrigues. Though yet a boy, Francis is married to Mary Stuart, Queen of Scotland, daughter of James V. and Mary of Lorraine, and niece to the Duc de Guise and the Cardinal de Lorraine.

Francis and Mary have known each other from earliest childhood. At the age of five the little Scottish Princess was sent to the Louvre to be educated with her royal cousins. Even at that tender age she was the delight and wonder of the

Court—a little northern rose-bud, transplanted into a southern climate, by-and-by to expand into a perfect flower. Her sweet temper, beauty, and winning manners gained all hearts. She was, moreover, says Brantôme, quiet, discreet, and accomplished. Accomplished, indeed, as well as learned, for, at fourteen, the fascinating girl recited a Latin oration of her own composition in the great gallery of the Louvre, before her future father-in-law, King Henry, and the whole Court, to the effect "that women ought to rival, if not to excel, men in learning." She spoke with such composure, her voice was so melodious, her gesture so graceful, and her person so lovely, that the King publicly embraced her, and swore a great oath that she alone was fit to marry with the Dauphin. Forthwith he betrothed her to his son Francis. This marriage between a youth and a girl yet in their teens was a dream of love, short, but without alloy.

Catherine rules, and Francis and Mary Stuart, too young and careless to desire any life but a perpetual holiday in each other's company, tremble at her frown and implicitly obey her.

Now and then Mary's maternal uncles, the princes of Lorraine, Francis, the great Duc de Guise (the same who took Calais and broke the

English Queen's heart), and the Cardinal de Lorraine, the proudest and falsest prelate in the sacred college,[1] endeavour to traverse the designs of Catherine, and to inspire their beautiful niece with a taste for intrigue—under their guidance, be it well understood. But all such attempts are useless. Mary loves poetry and her lute, revels in banquets and masques, hunts, and games, and toys with her boy-husband, of whose society she never wearies.

Nevertheless, the Queen-mother hates her, accuses her of acting the part of a spy for her uncles, the Guises, and, sneering, speaks of her as "une petite reinette qui fait tourner toutes les têtes."

The Court is at Amboise, that majestic castle planted on a pile of sombre rocks that throw gloomy shadows across the waters of the Loire, widened at this spot into the magnitude of a lake, the river being divided by an island and crossed by two bridges.

Over these bridges they come, a glittering procession, preceded by archers and attended by pages and men-at-arms. Francis rides in front; he is tall, slight and elegantly formed, and sits his horse with perfect grace. His grey, almond-shaped eyes sparkle as he turns them upon the young Queen

[1] See Note 9.

riding at his side. Mary is seated on a dark palfrey. She is dressed in a white robe, fastened from the neck downwards with jewelled buttons. The robe itself is studded with gold embroidery and trimmed with ermine. A ruff of fine lace, and a chain of gold, from which hangs a medallion, are round her slender throat. Her hair is drawn back from her forehead, and a little pointed cap, set with jewels, to which is attached a thin white veil falling behind, sets off the chiselled features, the matchless eyes, and exquisite complexion of her fair young face.

Catherine and the Duc de Guise, the Cardinal de Lorraine and the Duc de Nemours, follow, and behind them the gay multitude of a luxurious Court fills up the causeway. Francis has a prepossessing face, but looks pale and ill. As they ride, side by side, Mary watches him with tender anxiety. Her sweet eyes rest on him as she speaks, and she caressingly places her hand upon his saddle-bow as they ascend the rocky steep leading to the castle.

When they dismount, the Queen-mother—her hard face set into a frown—passes, without speaking a word, into her own apartments. The Duc de Guise and the Cardinal de Lorraine also retire

with gloomy looks. Not a single word do either of them address to Francis or to Mary. The young sovereigns enter the royal chambers, a stately suite of apartments, the lofty windows of which, reaching from ceiling to floor, overlook the river. Folding doors open into a gallery wainscoted with oak richly gilt, with a carved ceiling emblazoned with coats of arms. The walls are covered with crimson brocade set in heavy frames of carved gold; chandeliers of glittering pendants hang from open rafters formed of various-coloured wood arranged in mosaic patterns. Beyond is a retiring-room, hung with choice tapestry of flowers and fruit on a violet ground, let into arabesque borders of white and gold. Inlaid tables of marble bear statues and tazzas of alabaster and enamel. Clustered candelabra of coloured Venetian glass hold perfumed candles, and the flowers of the spring are placed in cups and vases of rarest pottery.

Mary, with a wave of her hand, dismisses her attendants. Francis sinks into a chair beside an open window utterly exhausted. He sighs, leans back his head, and closes his eyes.

"*Mon amour*," says Mary, throwing her arms round him, and kissing his white lips, "you are very weary. Tell me—why is the Queen-mother so

grave and silent? When I spoke she did not answer me. My uncles, too, frighten me with their black looks. Tell me, Francis, what have I done?"

"Done, sweetest?—nothing," answered Francis, unclosing his eyes, and looking at her. "Our mother is busied with affairs of state, as are also your uncles. There is much to disquiet them." Francis draws her closer to him, laying his head upon her shoulder wearily, and again closing his eyes. "It is some conspiracy against her and your uncles—the Guises—*mignonne*," added he, whispering into her ear.

"Conspiracy! Holy Virgin, how dreadful! Why did you not tell me this before we left Blois?"

"I feared to frighten you, dear love, ere we were safe within the thick walls of this old fortress."

Mary starts up and seizes his hand.

"Tell me, tell me," she says, in an unsteady voice, "what is this conspiracy?"

"A plot of the Huguenots, in which Condé and the Colignis are concerned," replies Francis, roused by her vehemence into attention. "Did you not mark how suddenly our uncle, Francis of Guise, appeared at Blois, and that he was closeted with her Majesty for hours?" Mary, her eyes extended to their utmost limit and fixed on his,

bows her head in assent. "Did we not leave immediately after the interview for Amboise? Did not that make you suspicious?"

"No, Francis; for you said that we came here to hold a joust and to hunt in the forest of Chanteloup. How could I doubt your word? Oh! this is horrible!"

"We came to Amboise, *ma mie*, because it is a stronghold, and Blois is an open town."

"Do you know no more? or will you still deceive me?" asks Mary eagerly, looking at him with tearful eyes.

"My mother told me that the Duc de Guise was informed by the Catholics of England (which tidings have been since confirmed), that the Huguenots are arming in force, that they are headed by Condé, that they are plotting to imprison the Queen-mother and your uncles, and to carry you and me to Paris by force."

"By force? Would they lay hands on us? Oh, Francis, are we safe in this castle?" exclaims Mary, clasping her hands. "Will our guards defend us? Are the walls manned? Is the town faithful? Are there plenty of troops to guard the bridges?"

As she speaks, Mary trembles so violently that

she has slid from her chair and sinks upon the ground, clinging to Francis in an agony of fear.

"Courage, my *reinette!* rise up, and sit beside me;" and Francis raises her in his arms and replaces her on her chair. "Here we are safe. This conspiracy is not directed against us, Mary. The people say my mother and the Guises rule, not I, the anointed King. The Huguenots want to carry us off to Paris for our good. Pardieu! I know little of the plot myself as yet; my mother refused to tell me. Anyhow, we are secure here at Amboise from Turk, Jew, or Huguenot, so cheer up, my lovely queen!"

As Mary looks up again further to question him, he stops her mouth with kisses.

"Let us leave all to the Queen-mother. She is wise, and governs for us while we are young. She loves not to be questioned. Sweetest, I am weary, give me a cup of wine; let me lie in your closet, and you shall sing me to sleep with your lute."

"But, Francis," still urges Mary, gently disengaging herself from his arms as he leads her away, "surely my uncles must be in great danger; a conspiracy perhaps means an assassination. I beseech you let me go and question them myself."

"*Nenni*," answers Francis, drawing her to him. "You shall come with me. I will not part with you for a single instant. Ah! *mignonne*, if you knew how my head aches, you would ask me no more questions, or I shall faint."

Mary's expressive face changes as the April sunshine. Her eyes fill with tears of tenderness as she leads Francis to a small closet in a turret exclusively her own,—a *chinoiserie*, quaint and bright as the plumage of a bird,—and seats him, supported by a pile of pillows, on a couch—luxurious for that period of stiff-backed chairs and wooden benches.

"Talk to me," says Francis, smoothing her abundant hair, which hung in dark masses on her shoulders as she knelt at his feet, "or, better still, sing to me. I love to hear your soft voice; only, no more politics—not a word of affairs of state, Marie. Sing to me those verses you showed to Ronsard, about the knight who leapt into a deep stream to pluck a flower for his love and was drowned by the spell of a jealous mermaid who watched him from among the flags."

Mary rises and fetches her lute. All expression of fear has left her face. Reassured by Francis and occupied alone by him, she forgets not only

the Huguenots and the conspiracy, but the whole world, beside the boy-husband, who bends lovingly over her as she tries the strings of her instrument. So let us leave them as they sit, two happy children, side by side, bathed in the brief sunshine of a changeful day in March, now singing, now talking of country fêtes, especially of a *carrousel* to take place on the morrow in the courtyard of the castle, in which the Grand Prieur is to ride disguised as a gipsy woman and carry a monkey on his back for a child!

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CHAPTER XIII.

A TRAITOR.

The Queen-mother sits alone; a look of care overshadows her face; her prominent eyes are fixed and glassy. From her window she can gaze at an old familiar scene, the terrace and parterre bordered by lime walks, planted by Francis I., where she has romped in many a game of *cache-cache* with him.

Presently she rises and summons an attendant from the ante-chamber.

"Call hither to me Maître Avenelle," says she to the dainty page who waits her command.

Avenelle, a lawyer and a Huguenot, is the friend of Barri, Seigneur de la Renaudie, the nominal leader of the Huguenot plot; and of which the Duc de Guise has been warned by the Catholics of England. Avenelle has, for a heavy bribe, been gained over in Paris by the Duke's secretary, Marmagnè; he has come to Amboise to betray his

friends "of the religion" by revealing to the Queen-mother all he knows of this vast Huguenot conspiracy, secretly headed by the Prince de Condé and by Admiral Coligni.

Avenelle enters and bows low before the Queen who is seated opposite to him at a writing-table. He is sallow and wasted-looking, with a gave face and an anxious eye; a tremor passes over him as he suddenly encounters the dark eyes of Catherine fixed upon him.

"Have you seen the Duc de Guise?" says she haughtily, shading her face with her hand the better to observe him, as he stands before her motionless and pale with fear.

"Yes, madame," replies he, again humbly bowing; "I come now from his chamber, whither I was conducted by M. Marmagne, his secretary."

"And you have confided to him all you know of this plot?"

"I have, madame, all."

"Is it entirely composed of Huguenots?"

"It is, madame."

"What are the numbers?"

"Perhaps two thousand, your Majesty."

Catherine starts, the lines on her face deepen, and her eyes glitter with astonishment and rage.

"Who is at the head of these rebels?" she asks suddenly, after pausing a few moments.

Avenelle trembles violently; the savage tone of her voice and her imperious manner show him his danger. His teeth chatter, and drops of moisture trickle down his forehead. So great is his alarm that, in spite of his efforts to reply, his voice fails him. Catherine, her eyes riveted on his, waves her hand with an impatient gesture.

"Why do not you answer me, Maître Avenelle? If you are waiting to invent a lie with which to deceive me, believe me, such deceit is useless. The torture-chamber is at hand; the screw will make you speak."

"Oh, madame," gasps Avenelle, making a successful effort to recover his voice, "I had no intention to deceive your Majesty; I am come to tell you all I know. It was a passing weakness that overcame me."

"Who, then, I again ask," says the Queen, taking a pen in her hand in order to note his reply, "who is at the head of this plot?"

"Madame, it is secretly headed by that heretic, the Prince de Condé. Coligni knows of it, as does also his brother d'Andelot, and the Cardinal de

Châtillon. The nominal leader, Barri de la Renaudie, is but a subordinate acting under their orders."

"Heretics do you call them; are not you, then, yourself a Huguenot?"

"Madame, I was," replies Avenelle obsequiously, with an effort to look fearless, for Catherine's glittering eyes are still upon him; "but his Highness the Duc de Guise has induced me to recant my errors."

"Ah!" says Catherine, smiling sarcastically; "I did not know our cousin of Guise troubled himself with the souls of his enemies. But this La Renaudie, was he not your friend? Did he not lodge with you in Paris?"

"He did lodge, for a brief space, in my house in Paris, madame; but I have no friend that is not a loyal subject to your Majesty." Avenelle now speaks more boldly.

Catherine eyes him from head to foot with a glance of infinite contempt. "I am glad to hear this for your own sake, Maître Avenelle," she replies drily. "What is the precise purpose of this plot?"

"Madame, it is said by the Huguenots that your Majesty, not your son, his Majesty Francis II.,

governs, and that under your rule no justice will ever be done to those of 'the religion;' that your Majesty seeks counsel of the Duc de Guise and of his brother the Cardinal de Lorraine, who are even more bitterly opposed than yourself to their interests. Therefore they have addressed themselves to the Prince de Condé, who is believed to share their opinions both political and religious, for present redress. The conspirators propose, madame, to place his Highness the Prince de Condé on the throne as Regent, until such measures are taken as will insure their independence; imprison your Majesty; send the young King and Queen to some unfortified place—such as Blois or Chenonceau—and banish the noble Duke and his brother the Cardinal from France."

While Avenelle, speaking rapidly, gives these details, Catherine sits unmoved. As he proceeds her eyes never leave him, and her hands, singularly small and delicate, are clenched upon her velvet robe. When he has done speaking a look of absolute fury passes over her face. There is a lengthened silence, during which her head sinks on her breast and she remains lost in thought. When she looks up all passion has faded out of her face. She appears as impassible as a statue, and

speaks in a clear metallic voice which betrays no vestige of emotion.

"Have these conspirators many adherents, Maître Avenelle?"

"I fear so, madame. Nearly two thousand are gathering together, from various points, at Nantes. On the 15th of the present month of March they would have attacked Blois. Had your Majesty not received timely warning and retreated to this fortified castle, these rebellious gentlemen would have captured your sacred person and that of our Sovereign and the young Queen. They would have kept you imprisoned until you had consented to abdicate the throne or to dismiss our great Catholic Princes of Lorraine, to whom and to your Majesty all evil influence is attributed."

"Influence? Yes, influence to punish traitors, heretics, and *spies!*" exclaims Catherine, and she darts a fierce look at Avenelle, who, though still pale as death, is now more composed, and meets her glance without flinching. He knows his life is in the balance, and he thinks he reads the Queen-mother rightly, that he may best ensure it by showing no cowardice.

"Is this all you know, Maître Avenelle?" says the Queen coldly.

"Yes, madame; and I trust you will remember that I have been the means of saving your Majesty and the young King from imprisonment, perhaps from death."

Catherine turns her terrible eyes full upon Avenelle. "Maître Avenelle, I appreciate both your disinterestedness and your loyalty," replies she, with a bitter sneer. "You, sir, will be kept a prisoner in this castle until his Majesty's council have tested the truth of what you say. We may *use* such as you, but we mistrust them and we despise them. If you have spoken the truth, your life shall be spared, but you will leave France for ever. If you have lied, you will die." As these words fall from her lips and are echoed through the lofty chamber, she strikes on a sharp metal placed before her. Two guards immediately enter and remove Avenelle in custody.

Catherine again strikes on the metal instrument, summones her attendant, and desires that Francis, Duc de Guise, and the Cardinal de Lorraine shall attend her.

In this interview between the heads of the Catholic party their plan of action is decided. A council of state is to be at once called at Amboise, to which the Huguenot chiefs, the Prince of

Condé, the Admiral Coligni, his brother d'Andelot, the Cardinal de Châtillon, and others are to be invited to attend; and a conciliatory edict in favour of the Calvinists, signed by the King, is to be proclaimed.

Thus the Reformed party will be thrown completely off their guard, and La Renaudie and the conspirators, emboldened by the apparent security and ignorance of the government, will gather about Amboise, the better to carry out their designs of capturing the King, the Queen, and the Queen-mother, and banishing or killing the Guises, her supposed evil counsellors. But another and secret condition is appended to this edict which would at once, if known, have awakened the suspicions and driven back from any approach to Amboise both the conspirators and the great chiefs of the Huguenot party.

This secret condition is that Francis, Duc de Guise, shall be forthwith nominated Lieutenant-General of the kingdom, and be invested with almost absolute power.*

CHAPTER XIV.

THE COUNCIL OF STATE.

THE council assembles in a sombre chamber panelled with dark oak, crossed by open rafters —a chamber that had remained unaltered since the days of Louis XI. A long table stands in the centre surrounded with leather chairs heavily carved, on which are seated the members of the council. Condé, who is of royal blood, takes the highest place on the Calvinist side. He is somewhat below middle height and delicately formed. His complexion is fair, his face comely; his dark eyes, sunk deep in his head, bright with the power of intellect, are both cunning and piercing. Nevertheless, it is a veiled face and betrays nothing. His dress is dark and simple, yet studiously calculated to display to the best advantage his supple and elegant figure. There is an air of authority about him that betrays itself unwittingly

in every glance he casts around the room. He is a man born to command.

Next to him is a man older, sturdier, rougher; a powerfully built man, who sits erect and firm in his chair. His head is covered with long white hair; he has overhanging eyebrows, a massive forehead, and a firmly-closed mouth. His weather-beaten face and sunken cheeks show that he has lived a life of exposure and privation—a man this to meet unmoved peril or death. He wears a homely suit of black woollen stuff much worn, and as he sits he leans forward, plunged in deep thought. This is Admiral Coligni. Beside him is his brother d'Andelot, slighter and much younger: he is dressed with the same simplicity as the Admiral, but wants that look of iron resolve and fanatic zeal which at the first glance stamps Coligni as a hero. Châtillon has placed himself beside his brother prelate of Lorraine. Each wears the scarlet robe of a cardinal, over which falls a deep edging of open guipure lace; their broad red hats, tasselled with silken cords, lie on the table before them. Lorraine is thin and dark, with a treacherous eye and a prevailing expression of haughty unconcern. Châtillon is bland and mild, but withal shrewd and astute; a

smile rests upon his thin lips as his eyes travel round the table, peering into every face, while from time to time he whispers some observation to the Cardinal de Lorraine, the Minister of State, who affects not to hear him.

A door opens within a carved recess or dais raised one step from the floor, and Francis and Mary appear. The whole council rises and salutes the young King and Queen. They seat themselves under a purple velvet canopy embroidered in gold with fleurs-de-lys and the oriflamme. They are followed by Catherine and Francis Duc de Guise, a man of majestic presence and lofty stature. He is spare, like the Cardinal, but his eager eye and sharply cut features, on which many a wrinkle has gathered, proclaim the man of action and the warrior, ardent in the path of glory, prompt, bold, and unscrupulous. At the sight of Coligni, Condé, and Châtillon, he knits his brows, and a sinister expression passes over his face which deepens into a look of actual cruelty as he silently takes his place next to Catherine de Medici.

The young King and Queen sit motionless side by side, like two children who are permitted to witness a solemn ceremony upon the promise of

silence and tranquillity. They are both curious and attentive. Not all Mary Stuart's questions have elicited further information from her uncles, and Francis, too feeble in health to be energetic, is satisfied with the knowledge that the Queen-mother occupies herself with affairs of state.

The Queen-mother, with a curious smile upon her face, stands for a few moments on the estrade facing the council-table. She coldly receives the chiefs of the Reformed faith, but her welcome is studiously polite. With the same grave courtesy she greets the Guises, Nemours, and the other Catholic princes. All are now seated in a circle of which Francis and Mary, motionless under the canopy of state, form the centre. Catherine rises from her chair and in a guarded address speaks of danger to the Crown from the Huguenot party, darkly hinting at a treasonable plot in which some near the throne are implicated, and she calls on those lords favourable to the Reformed religion for advice and support in this emergency.

As she speaks an evil light gathers in her eye, especially when she declares that she has at this time summoned her son's trusty counsellors of the Calvinist faith in order to consider an edict of pacification, calculated to conciliate *all* his Majesty's

subjects, and to rally *all* his faithful servants round his throne.

Her composed and serious countenance, the grave deliberation of her discourse, her frank yet stately avowal of peril to the State and desire for counsel in an hour of danger, are all so admirably simulated that those not aware of her perfidy are completely duped.

Francis, her son, listens with wonder to his mother's words, believing, as he does, that she is both indignant and alarmed at the machinations of that very party she has called to Amboise and which she now proposes to propitiate.

The Duc de Guise, who perfectly understands her drift, secretly smiles at this fresh proof of the dissimulation and astuteness of his cousin who caresses ere she grasps her prey. When she has ended he loudly applauds her conciliatory resolutions, and by so doing astonishes still more the unsuspicious Francis, as well as his niece Mary whose wondering eyes are fixed on him.

As to Coligni and the other Protestants, they fall blindfolded into the snare spread for them by Catherine, all save the Prince de Condé, who, crafty and treacherous himself, is more suspicious of others. He has marked, too, the Queen-

mother's words, "some near the throne," and thinks he knows to whom they are applied. However he immediately rises and in a few well-chosen phrases declares himself ready to defend the royal cause with his life. The Admiral next speaks, and in an eloquent harangue he unsuspectingly dilates on his own views of the present administration, and reproves the ambition of those princes who usurp the government of France. "There are two millions of Protestants in the kingdom," he says, "who look to the heads of their own faith for relief from the tyranny and injustice under which they have long languished. Two millions," repeats Coligni in a grave, sad voice, looking steadfastly round the circle, "who seek to live at peace, industrious, tranquil, loyal. But these two millions demand that they shall enjoy equal privileges with the least of his Majesty's Catholic subjects. This is now refused. They ask to be neither suspected, watched, nor wilfully persecuted. If any conspiracy exists, such as is known to her Majesty the Queen-mother—and I accept her statement as true with the deepest sorrow—it can only arise from the bitter feeling engendered by the disgrace of these Calvinistic subjects of this realm who are uniformly treated as aliens, and

repulsed with cruel persistency from such places of trust and honour as their services have entitled them to enjoy. Let these heavy grievances be removed, let his Majesty reign for himself *alone*"—and Coligni's eye rests on the Duc de Guise and the Queen-mother—"with equal favour over both parties, Catholic as well as Protestant. Let the conciliatory edict now before the council be made public, and I, Gaspard de Coligni, bind myself upon my plighted word as a noble and upon my conscience as a devout Calvinist, that the House of Valois will for ever live in the hearts of our people, and receive from them as entire a devotion as ever animated subject to his sovereign."

A dead silence follows Coligni's address, and the Duc de Guise and the Cardinal de Lorraine exchange glances of indignation.

Francis has become more and more mystified. Timid and inexperienced, he fears to betray his absolute ignorance of state affairs, and perhaps incense his mother by indiscreet questions. But when the parchment, heavy with seals of state, is produced and borne to him by the Chancellor for signature, he can no longer conceal his astonishment that he should be called on to sign an edict

giving both liberty and protection to those very persons whom the Queen-mother and his uncles had represented to him as his mortal enemies. He looks so long and earnestly at Catherine, that she, fearing that by one mistaken word he is about to destroy the whole fabric of her masterly dissimulation, rises quickly from the arm-chair in which she sits, and advancing quickly towards him with a commanding look and imperious gesture, takes the pen from the hand of the Chancellor and presents it to him herself.

"Sign, my son," says she, "this edict which has been framed by the unanimous advice of your council in favour of your loyal subjects. Fear not to sanction this royal act of mercy. Your Majesty is still too young to understand the far-seeing wisdom of the act. Take it on my word, Sire, take it *now* on my word. You will understand it better later."

"Truly, madame," replies the King, "I call God to witness that I desire the good of all my subjects, Huguenot and Catholic." So saying he takes the pen and signs the edict. The council forthwith breaks up, with what wondering curiosity on the part of the King and of Mary, who dare ask no questions, cannot be told.

CHAPTER XV.

CATHERINE'S VENGEANCE.

MEANWHILE the conspirators, emboldened by the news of the edict of Amboise, carried out their purpose exactly as the Queen-mother intended, with perfect confidence and little concealment. Catherine's object was to draw them towards Amboise and there destroy them. Band after band, in small detachments the better to avoid suspicion, rode up from Nantes where they lay, to concentrate in force on the Loire and within Amboise itself. When sufficiently strong they proposed to carry off the King and Queen by a *coup-de-main*, make away with the Jesuitical Guises, banish the Queen-mother to some distant fortress, and place Condé on the throne as Regent.

They came through the plains of Touraine, halting beside solitary farms, in the vineyards, under the willows and tufted underwood that border the rivers, and through the dark forests that lie on the

hills behind Amboise. Band after band reached certain points, halted at the spots indicated to them, and met other detachments with whom they were to act; but not one of them was heard of more.

The walls of the Castle of Amboise bristled with troops, and the open country towards Loches was full of soldiers. Trusty guards stationed on the double bridge across the Loire were instructed by the Duc de Guise, who wielded absolute power and who had now gained minute knowledge of the plot, to take all suspected persons prisoners, or if needful, slay them as they stood. Crowds of prisoners poured into Amboise, tied together and driven like cattle to the shambles. Those who were known were reserved for a further purpose, the rest — the herd — were either hanged or drowned. The Loire was full of floating corpses.

Condé, wary with the wariness of his race, ventured not again to Amboise. Coligni and his brother knew not how to oppose a power exercised in the royal name, but Jean Barri de la Renaudie, the ostensible leader of the conspiracy and a bold adventurer, alarmed at the mysterious disappearance of party after party of his followers, set out

in rash haste towards Amboise. He too was watched for and expected among the wooded hills of the forest of Château Renaud.

La Renaudie had encamped in the woods towards morning after advancing under cover of the night from Niort. Suddenly his detachment was approached by two or three horsemen, who, after reconnoitring for a few moments, retreated. These were evidently the advance guard of the royal forces. La Renaudie immediately broke up his camp and dashed on towards Amboise, concealed by the overhanging trees on the banks of a stream which flowed through a wild defile. In a hollow of the river, among beds of stone and sand, he was fallen upon by a regiment of royal troops who had tracked and finally caught him as in a trap. His own cousin Pardilliac commanded the attack, he recognised him by the flag. A deadly struggle ensued, in which both cousins fell. La Renaudie's corpse, carried in triumph to Amboise, was hung in chains over the bridge.

Then Condé, Coligni, and the other Calvinists came fully to understand what the edict of conciliation really meant.

The Castle of Amboise during all this time had been strictly guarded; every door was watched, every gallery was full of troops; the garden and the

walled plateau, within which stands the beautiful little votive chapel erected by Anne of Brittany, was like a camp. Silence, suspicion, and terror were on every face. Although the Queen-mother, with her crafty smiles and unruffled brow, affected entire ignorance and exhorted "la petite reinette," as she called Mary, to hunt in the adjoining forest, and to assemble the Court in the state rooms with the usual banquets and festivities, Mary, pale and anxious, remained shut up with Francis in her private apartments.

"My uncle," said Francis to the Duc de Guise whom he met leaving the Queen-mother's retiring-room, "I must know what all these precautions mean. Why are so many troops encamped about the castle, the guards doubled, and the gates closed? Why do you avoid me and the Queen? Uncle, I insist on knowing more."

"It is nothing, Sire—nothing," faltered the Duke, who, dissembler as he was, could scarcely conceal the confusion the King's questions caused him. "A trifling conspiracy has been discovered, a few rebels have been caught, your Majesty's leniency has been abused by some false Huguenots. These troops assembled about the castle are your Majesty's trusty guards brought here to ensure the maintenance of the terms of the edict."

"But, uncle, the Queen and I hear the clash of arms and firing on the bridges as against an enemy. I cannot sleep, so great is the tumult. What have I done that my people should mistrust me? Huguenots and Catholics are alike my subjects. Are you sure, uncle, that it is not you and my mother that they hate? I would that you would all go away for a while and let me rule alone, then my people would know me."

When all the Huguenot conspirators, about two thousand in number, were either massacred or imprisoned, Catherine threw off the mask. She called to her Francis and the young Queen. "My children," said she, "a plot has been discovered by which the Prince de Condé was to be made Regent. You and the Queen were to be shut up for life, or murdered perhaps. Such as remain unpunished of the enemies of the House of Valois are about to be executed on the southern esplanade of the castle. You are too young to be instructed in all these details, but, my son, when you signed that edict, I told you I would afterwards explain it—now come and behold the reason. Mary, my reinette, do not turn so pale, you will need to learn to be both stern and brave to rule your rough subjects the Scotch."

Catherine, erect and calm, led the way to the

state apartments overlooking on either side the garden, terrace, and river. Large mullioned windows had by the command of Francis I. taken the place of the narrow lights of the older fortress. He had changed the esplanade and southern terraced front within the walls and the balconied windows to the north overlooking the town, into that union of manoir and château which he first created.

The boy-King and Queen followed tremblingly the steps of their mother, who strode on in front with triumphant alacrity. Without, on the pleasant terrace bordered by walls now bristling with guns and alive with guards and archers, on the pinnacles and fretted roof of the votive chapel, which stands to the right in a tuft of trees inside a bastion, the sun shone brightly, but the blue sky and the laughing face of nature seemed but to mock the hideous spectacle in front. Close under the windows of the central gallery, a scaffold was erected covered with black, on which stood an executioner masked, clothed in a red robe. Long lines of prisoners packed closely together, a dismal crowd, wan and emaciated by imprisonment in the loathsome holes of the mediæval castle, stood by hundreds ranged against the outer walls and those

of the chapel, guarded by archers and musketeers; as if such despairing wretches, about to be butchered like cattle in the shambles, needed guarding! The windows of the royal gallery were wide open, flags streamed from the architraves, and a loggia, or covered balcony, had been prepared, hung with crimson velvet, with seats for the royal princes.

Within the gallery the whole Court stood ranged against the sculptured walls. Catherine entered first. With an imperious gesture she signed to Mary, who clung, white as death, to her husband, to take her place under a royal canopy placed in the centre of the window. Francis she drew into a chair beside herself, the Chancellor, the Duc de Guise, his brother the Cardinal, and the Duc de Nemours seated themselves near. Their appearance was the signal to begin the slaughter. Prisoner after prisoner was dragged up beneath the loggia to the scaffold and hastily dispatched. Cries of agony were drowned in the screeching of fifes and the loud braying of trumpets. The mutilated bodies were flung on one side to be cast into the river, the heads borne away to be placed upon the bridge. Blood ran in streams and scented the fresh spring breezes. The executioner wearily rested from his labour, and another masked figure,

dressed like himself in red from head to foot, took his place.

Spellbound and speechless sat the young Queen. A look of horror was on her face. She had clutched the hand of Francis as she sat down, and ere a few minutes had passed, she had fainted.

Catherine, who, wholly unmoved, was contemplating the death of her enemies the Huguenots, turned with a terrible frown towards her son, handing him some strong essence with which to revive Mary. As her senses returned, even the basilisk eyes of her dreaded mother-in-law could not restrain her. One glance at the awful spectacle gave her courage; she gave a wild scream, and rushing forward, flung herself passionately at the feet of her uncle, Francis of Guise.

"Uncle, dear uncle, stay this fearful massacre. Speak to the Queen, or I shall die. Oh! why was I brought here to behold such a sight?"

"My niece," answered the Duke solemnly, raising her from the ground, and tenderly kissing her on the cheek, "have courage; these are but a few pestilent heretics who would have dethroned you and your husband, the King, and set up a false religion. By their destruction we are doing good service to God and to the blessed Virgin.

Such vermin deserve no pity. You ought to rejoice in their destruction."

"Alas! my mother," said Francis, also rising, "I too am overcome at this horrible sight, I also would crave your highness's permission to retire; the blood of my subjects, even of my enemies, is horrible to see. Let us go!"

"My son, I command you to stay!" broke in Catherine, furious with passion, and imperiously raising her hand to stay him. "Duc de Guise, support your niece, the Queen of France. Teach her the duty of a sovereign."

Again Francis, intimidated by his mother's violence, reseated himself along with the unhappy Mary, motionless beside him. Again the steel of the axe flashed in the sunshine, and horrible contortions writhed the bodies of the slain. It was too much. Mary, young, tender, compassionate—afraid to plead for mercy as though committing a crime, again fainted, and was again recovered. The Queen-mother, to whom the savage scene was a spectacle of rapture, again commanded her to be reseated; but Francis, now fully roused by the sufferings of his wife, interposed.

"My mother, I can no longer permit your

Majesty to force the Queen to be present. You are perilling her health. Govern my kingdom and slay my subjects, but let me judge what is seemly for my wife."

So, bearing her in his arms, with the assistance of her ladies, Francis withdrew.

When the butchery was over, and the headless bodies were floating in the river or strung up on the branches of the trees or piled in heaps about the castle, Catherine retired. She commanded that the remains of the chief conspirators should be hung in chains from the iron balustrades of the stone balcony which protects the windows of the royal gallery and which still remains intact, on the north front of the castle, towards the river. The remainder were to be thrown into the Loire. This stone balcony borders now, as then, the whole length of the state apartments towards the river. A fall of some hundred feet down a sheer mass of grey rock on which the castle stands makes the head dizzy. Over this precipice the headless bodies dangled, swaying to and fro in the March wind, a hideous and revolting sight. No one could pass through any of the apartments of the castle without beholding

it. But despised humanity in the shape of the murdered Huguenots asserted its claim on the attention of the Court, and the stench of these bodies hung to the balcony, and of those strung up on the trees, and the rotting corpses that dammed up the river, soon became so overwhelming, that even Catherine herself was forced to retreat, and accompany her son and the young Queen to Chenonceau. The shock and excitement were, however, too much for the sickly Francis. Rapidly he pined and died; no physician was found who could cure a nameless malady.

Mary Stuart, a widow at eighteen, passionate and romantic, clung fondly to that "pleasant land" where she had spent such happy days with the gracious Francis. She had been created Duchesse de Touraine at her marriage, and craved earnestly to be allowed to enjoy that apanage rather than be banished to reign in a barren land, which she dreaded like a living tomb. But her ambitious uncles, the Duc de Guise and the Cardinal de Lorraine, who were to her as parents, obstinately insisted on her departure for Scotland. So she sailed from Calais; and, from the deck of the ship that bore her across the seas, as the shores of

France — which she was never more to see — gradually faded from her view, she sang to her lute that plaintive song, so identified with her memory :—

"Adieu, oh plaisant pays!
Adieu! oh ma patrie,
La plus chérie, qui a nourrit
Ma belle enfance,—Adieu!"

CHAPTER XVI.

THE ASTROLOGER'S CHAMBER.

WHEREVER Catherine chose to reside, either in Paris or in Touraine, an observatory for the stars was always at hand, and Cosmo Ruggiero, who had attended her from Italy, never left her. Cosmo was the Queen's familiar demon; he was both astrologer, alchemist, and philosopher. He fed the glowing furnaces with gold and silver, sometimes with dead men's bones; concocted essences, powders, and perfumes; drew horoscopes, and modelled wax figures in the likeness of those who had incurred the Queen's enmity. These were supposed to suffer pangs from each stab inflicted on their images, and to waste away as the wax similitudes melted in the flames. Cosmo was also purveyor of poisons to her Majesty, and dealt largely in herbs and roots fatal to life. His apartments and the observatory were always near those of the Queen and connected with them by a secret stair.

We are at the Tuileries.[1] It stands on a plot of ground outside Paris—where tiles were baked and rubbish shot—given by Francis I. to his mother, Louise de Savoie. Charles IX., who has succeeded his brother—Francis II.—inhabits the Louvre, now entirely rebuilt by Francis I. The Queen-mother desired to live alone. She therefore commanded Philippe de Lorme to erect a new palace for her use, consisting of a central pavilion, with ample wings. Catherine is now middle-aged; her complexion is darker, the expression of her face sterner and more impassive. She seldom relaxes into a smile except to deceive an enemy. In her own person she dislikes and despises the luxury of dress, and principally wears black since the death of her husband. But on fitting occasions of state she, too, robes herself in royal apparel. She stands before us in a long black dress, tightly fitting her shape. She has grown much stouter though she is still upright and majestic. Her active habits and her extraordinary capacity for mental labour are the same. A stiff ruff is round her neck and a black coif upon her head. Jewels she rarely uses. Her suite of rooms at the Tuileries, hung with sombre tapestry or

[1] See Note 10.

panelled with dark wood, are studiously plain. She loves artists and the arts, but pictures and statues are not appropriate to the state business she habitually transacts. There is a certain consistent grandeur in her plain, unadorned *entourage;* a sense of subdued power—hidden yet apparent—that makes those who approach her tremble. Her second son Charles, now King of France, is wholly under her influence. He was only ten years old when he ascended the throne at the death of his brother Francis, and his mother has carefully stamped out every good quality in his naturally frank and manly nature. Now he is rough and cruel, loves the sight of blood, and has become a perfect Nimrod. He blows the horn with such violence, so often and so loud, that he has injured his lungs in consequence. Charles knows much more about the bears, wolves, deer, and wild boars of France, than of his Christian subjects.

The Princess Marguerite is now grown into a woman, "a noble mind in a most lovely person," says the flattering Brantôme. Her mother encourages Marguerite's taste for intrigue, and throws her into the company of women, such as Madame de Sauve, the court Ninon de l'Enclos of that day. Catherine contemplates her beauty, not with the proud

affection of a mother, but as a useful bait to entrap those whom she desires to gain. When she was young herself the Queen never allowed any tender passion to stand in her way, but ruthlessly sacrificed all who were either useless or troublesome.

When the palace is quiet, and the sighing of the winter wind without, as it sweeps along the quays and ruffles the surface of the river, is only broken by the challenge of the sentinels on the bastion bordering the Seine, Catherine rises from her chair. She passes over her black dress a long white mantle, puts her feet into silken slippers, lights a scented bougie, takes from her girdle a golden key—which is hid there along with a poisoned dagger in case of need—draws aside the tapestry, unlocks a hidden door, and mounts a secret stair. Cosmo Ruggiero is seated on a folding stool in a small laboratory under the roof. He is reading an ancient manuscript. A lamp illuminates the page, and he is, or affects to be, so profoundly absorbed that he does not hear his terrible mistress enter. She glides like a ghost beside him and laying her hand on his shoulder rouses him. Ruggiero rises hastily and salutes her. Catherine draws a stool beside him, seats herself, and signs to him to do so also.

"Well, Cosmo! always studying; always at work in my service," says she, in a low metallic voice.

"Yes, madame, I have no other pleasure than in your Majesty's service."

"Yes, yes! you serve the Queen for love, and science out of interest — I understand. Disinterestedness is the custom of our country, my friend."

"Your Majesty mistakes; I serve her as a loyal servant and countryman should."

"La! la!" says Catherine, "we know each other, Cosmo,—no professions. Is the poison ready I ordered of you, the subtle powder to sprinkle on gloves or flowers? It is possible I may want it shortly."

Ruggiero rises and hands a small sealed packet, enclosed in satin, to the Queen, who places it in her bosom.

"Madame," he says, "beware! this poison is most powerful."

"So much the worse for those for whom it is destined," replies Catherine; and a cruel smile lights up her face for a moment. "It will serve me the quicker. But to business, Cosmo. What say the stars? Have you drawn the horoscopes?"

"Here, madame, are the horoscopes;" and he draws from his belt a bundle of papers. "Here are the celestial signs within the House of Life of all the royal persons concerned, traced by the magic pencil from the dates you furnished me."

Catherine glances at the papers. "Explain to me their import," says she, looking at him with grave attention.

"Your present design, madame, to marry Madame Marguerite to the King of Navarre appears favourable to the interests of France. A cloud now rests upon the usually brilliant star of the King of Navarre, but another night, madame, perhaps——"

"This is all very vague, Ruggiero, I want an absolute prediction," says Catherine, fixing her black eyes full upon the soothsayer. "Among all these illustrious personages is there not one whose horoscope is clear and defined?"

"Assuredly, madame; will your Majesty deign to interrogate me as to the future? I will unfold the purposes of the stars as I have read them."

"You have spoken of the Princess. Does she love the young Duc Henri de Guise?"

"Madame, her highness affects the Duke; but she is unstable in her affections."

"The Queen of Navarre—will she still forward this marriage?"

"It will cause her death."

"How?"

"By poison."

"Where?"

"At Paris."

"That is well," answers the Queen, and deep thought darkens her swarthy face. "Her son, the King of Navarre—what of him?"

"He, madame, is safe for awhile, though he will shortly be exposed to extreme peril."

"But is he destined to die violently?"

"Perhaps; but long years hence. His hair will be grey before the poniard I see hovering over him strikes. But, as I have said to-night, there is a cloud upon his star. Long he will certainly escape steel, fire, illness, or accident; he will bear a charmed life. Madame, the King of Navarre will be a proper husband for Madame Marguerite."

"But how of that bold man, the Duc de Guise, who dares without my leave to aspire to the hand of the Princess?" asked Catherine.

"Henri de Guise, madame, will die a violent death, as will his father and Coligni. The Admiral will be stabbed in his own house. This is certain."

The Queen smiles, and for a time is silent.

"Tell me," at length she almost whispers, "have you discovered anything more about myself and my sons?"

"Madame, I tremble to reply," replies Ruggiero, hesitating.

"Speak, I command you, Cosmo."

Catherine rises, and lays her hand heavily upon his arm. Her eyes meet his.

"If I must reveal the future of your Majesty and the royal princes, well, let it be done. Your Majesty can but kill me. I fear not death."

"Fool, your life is safe!"

"You, madame, will live; but the Princes, your sons——" and he stops and again hesitates.

"Speak!" hisses Catherine between her set teeth. "Speak, or, *pardieu!* I will force you," and she raises her hand aloft, as if to strike him.

"Madame," replies Ruggiero, quite unmoved by her violence, rising from his stool, and moving towards the wall, "you yourself shall see the future that awaits them." He withdraws a black curtain covering an arched recess and reveals a magic mirror. "The kings your sons, madame, shall pass before you. Each shall reign as many years as he makes the circuit of that dark chamber

you see reflected on the polished steel. There is your eldest son, Francis. See how feebly he moves, how pale he looks. He never lived to be a man. Twice he slowly passes round, and he is gone. The next is Charles, ninth of that name. Thirteen times he turns around, and as he moves a mist of blood gathers about him. Look, it thickens —it hides him. He shall reign thirteen years, and die a bloody death, having caused much blood to flow. Here is Henri, Duc d'Anjou, who shall succeed him. A few circuits, and then behold—a muffled figure—a monk, springs on him from behind. He falls and vanishes."

There is a pause.

"What! Cosmo," whispers Catherine, who stood supporting herself on the back of a high chair opposite the magic mirror. "Francis, Charles, Henry are gone, but do they leave no child?"

"None, madame."

"Where, then, is d'Alençon, my youngest boy? Let me see him."

"Madame," falters Ruggiero, "his highness is not destined to reign. The successor of your sons is before you;" and on the magic glass rises up, clear and distinct, the image of the King of Navarre. With strong, firm steps he circles the mystic

chamber of life twenty times. As he passes on the twenty-first round, a mist gathers round him; he falls and vanishes.

At the sight of Henry of Navarre, the Queen's composure utterly forsakes her. She trembles from head to foot and sinks into a chair. A sombre fire shoots from her eyes.

"I will take care *that* shall never be!" gasps she, unable to speak with rage.

After a few moments she rose, took up her light, and without one other word descended as she had come.

CHAPTER XVII.

AT CHENONCEAU.

The Château of Chenonceau, so greatly coveted by Catherine de Medici in her youth, still remains to us. It lies in a rural district of the Touraine, far from cities and the traffic of great thoroughfares. Spared, from its isolated position, by the First Revolution, this monument of the Renaissance, half palace half château, is as beautiful as ever—a picturesque mass of pointed turrets, glistening spires, perpendicular roofs, lofty pavilions, and pillared arches. It is partly built over the river Cher, at once its defence and its attraction.

Henry II., as also his father, Francis, who specially loved this sunny plaisance and often visited it in company with his daughter-in-law, Catherine, and his mistress, the Duchesse d'Etampes, had both lavished unknown sums on its embellishment.

Chenonceau is approached by a drawbridge over a moat fed by the river. On the southern side a

stately bridge of five arches has been added by Diane de Poitiers in order to reach the opposite bank, where the high roofs and pointed turrets of the main building are seen to great advantage, rising out of scattered woods of oak and ash, which are divided into leafy avenues leading into fair water-meadows beside the Cher. By Catherine's command this bridge has been recently covered and now forms a spacious wing of two stories, the first floor fitted as a banqueting hall, the walls broken by four embayed windows, opening on either side and looking up and down the stream.

A fresh-breathing air comes from the river and the forest, a scent of moss and flowers extremely delicious. The cooing of the cushat doves, the cry of the cuckoo, the flutter of the breeze among the trees, and the hum of insects dancing in the sunbeams are the voices of this sylvan solitude. The blue sky blends into the green woods, and the white clouds, sailing over the tree-tops, make the shadows come and go among the arches of the bridge and the turrets of the château.

A sudden flourish of trumpets breaks the silence. It is Catherine, in the early summer, coming, like Jezebel, to possess herself of her fair domain. She is habited in black and wears a velvet toque with

an ostrich plume. A perfect horsewoman, she rides with a stately grace down the broad avenue leading from the high road, followed by her maids of honour—a bevy of some forty beauties, the *escadron volant de la reine*, who serve her political intrigues by fascinating alike Huguenots and Catholics.

To the right of the Queen-mother rides Madame Marguerite, her daughter—by-and-by to become infamous as Queen of Navarre, wife of Henry IV.—now a laughter-loving girl, who makes her brown jennet prance, out of pure high spirits. She is tall, like all the Valois, and finely formed. Her skin is very fair and her eyes full of expression; but there is a hard look on her delicately-featured face that belies her attractive appearance.

On the other side of the Queen-mother is her son, the young King, Charles IX. He has a weak though most engaging countenance. Naturally brave and witty and extremely frank and free, the artifices of his mother's corrupt Court have made him what he now is—cruel, violent, and suspicious. Catherine has convinced him that he is deceived by all the world except herself, and leads him at her will. He is to marry shortly the daughter of the Emperor Maximilian. Beside him is the vicious and elegant Duc d'Anjou, his

next brother, of whom Charles is extremely jealous. Already Henry has been victor at Jarnac, and almost rivals Henry of Navarre in the number of battles he fights. He is to be elected King of Poland during his brother's life. Henry is handsomer than Charles, but baby-faced and effeminate. He wears rouge, and is as gay as a woman in his attire. Catherine's youngest son, d'Alençon, long-nosed, ill-favoured, and sullen, rides beside his sister.

Behind the royal Princess is Francis, Duc de Guise, a man, as we have seen, of indomitable will and unflinching purpose; fanatical in his devotion to the Catholic Church, and of unbounded ambition. He secretly cherishes the settled purpose of his house,—destruction of the race of Valois. Ere long he will be assassinated at Orleans, by Poltrot, a Huguenot, a creature of Coligni, who firmly believes he will ensure his salvation by this crime. Such is Christianity in the sixteenth century! There are also two cardinals mounted on mules. Lorraine, a true Guise, most haughty and unscrupulous of politicians and of churchmen; and d'Este, newly arrived from Ferrara, insinuating, treacherous, and artistic. He has brought in his train from Italy the great poet Tasso, who follows his patron, and wears a gabardine and cap of dark satin. Tasso

looks sad and careworn spite of the high favour shown him by his countrywoman, the Queen-mother. Ronsard, the court poet, is beside Tasso, and Châtelard, who, madly enamoured of the widowed Queen, Mary Stuart, is about to follow her to Scotland, and to die of his presumptuous love ere long at Holyrood.

As this brilliant procession passes down the broad avenue through pleasant lawns forming part of the park, at a fast trot, a rider is seen, mounted on a powerful black horse, who neither entirely conceals himself nor attempts to join the Court. As he passes in and out among the underwood skirting the adjoining forest, many eyes are bent upon him. The Queen-mother specially, turns in her saddle the better to observe him, and then questions her sons as to whether they recognise this solitary cavalier, whose face and figure are completely hidden by a broad Spanish hat and heavy riding cloak.

At the moment when the Queen-mother has turned her head to make these inquiries and is speaking earnestly to Francis of Guise, whom she has summoned to her side, the unknown rider crosses the path of the Princess Marguerite (who in frolicsome mood is making her horse leap over some ditches

in the grass), and throws a rose before her. Marguerite looks up with a gleam of delight, their eyes meet for an instant; she raises her hand, kisses it, and waves it towards him. The stranger bows to the saddle-bow, bounds into the thicket, and is seen no more. The royal party cross the drawbridge through two lines of attendants, picquers, retainers, pages, and running footmen, and dismount at the arched entrance from which a long stone passage leads to the great gallery, the staircase, and the various apartments.

Leaving the young King and the Princes, his brothers, to the care of the chamberlains who conduct them to their various apartments, the Queen-mother turns to the left, followed by the Princess, who is somewhat alarmed lest her mother should have observed her recognition of the disguised cavalier. They pass through the guard-room—a lofty chamber, with raftered ceiling and walls hung with tapestry, on which cuirasses, swords, lances, casques, shields, and banners are suspended, fashioned into various devices.

Beyond is a saloon, and through a narrow door in a corner is a small writing-closet within a turret. Catherine, who knows the château well, has chosen this suite of rooms apart from

the rest. She enters the closet alone, closes the door, seats herself beside the casement, and gazes at the broad river flowing beneath. Her eye follows the current onwards to where the stream, by a graceful bend, loses itself among copses of willow and alder. She smiles a smile of triumph. All is now her own. Then she summons her chamberlain, and commands a masque on the river for the evening, to celebrate her arrival. None shall say that she, a Medici, neglects the splendid pageantry of courts. Besides, the hunting parties, banquets, and masques are too precious as political opportunities to be disregarded.

Having dismissed her chamberlain, who with his white wand of office bows low before her, she calls for writing materials, bidding the Princess and a single lady-in-waiting, Charlotte de Pressney, her favourite attendant, remain without in the saloon.

This is a large apartment, used by Catherine as a sleeping-room, with a high vaulted ceiling of dark oak, heavily carved, the walls panelled with rare marbles, brought by the Queen's command from Italy. Busts on sculptured pedestals, ponderous chairs, carved cabinets and inlaid tables, stand around. In one corner there is a bedstead of walnut-wood with heavy hangings of purple

velvet which are gathered into a diadem with the embossed initials "C. M.," and an antique silver toilet-table, with a mirror in Venetian glass set in a shroud of lace. The polished floor has no carpet, and there is not a chair that can be moved without an effort. A window, looking south towards the river and the woods, is open. The summer breezes fill the room with fragrance. Under a ponderous mantelpiece of coloured marbles Marguerite seats herself on a narrow settee. Her large, sparkling eyes and animated face, her comely shape, and easy though stately bearing, invite, yet repel, approach. She still wears her riding-dress of emerald velvet laced with gold, and a plumed cap lies beside her. Her luxuriant hair, escaped from a golden net, covers her shoulders. She is a perfect picture of youth and beauty, and as fresh as her namesake, the daisy.

Charlotte de Pressney, at least ten years older than the Princess, is an acknowledged belle. Her features are regular, her complexion brilliant, and her face full of intelligence; but there is a cunning expression about her dimpling mouth that greatly mars her beauty.

"Have you nothing for me, Charlotte?" whispers the Princess, stretching out her little hand

glistening with precious rings. "I know you have. Give it me. His eyes told me so when he passed me in the avenue."

"Your highness must not ask me. Suppose her Majesty opens that door and sees me in the act of giving you a letter?"

"Oh! *méchante*, why do you plague me? I know you have something hidden; give it me, or I will search you," and she jumps up and casts her soft arms round the lady-in-waiting.

Charlotte disengages herself gently, and with her eyes fixed on the low door leading into the Queen's closet sighs deeply and takes a letter from her bosom, bound with blue silk and sealed with the arms of Guise.

"Ah! my colours! Is he not charming, my lover?" mutters Marguerite, as her eager eyes devour the lines. "He says he has followed us, disguised, from Tours; not even his father knows he has come, but believes him to be in Paris, in case he should be questioned by the Queen-mother,—Charlotte, do you think her Majesty recognised him in the avenue? He was admirably disguised."

"Your highness knows that nothing escapes the Queen's eye. The sudden appearance of a

stranger in this lonely spot must have created observation."

"Ah! is he not adorable, Charlotte, to come like a real knight-errant to gaze at his lady-love? How grand he looked—my noble Guise, my warrior, my hero!" and Marguerite leans back pensively on the settee as though calling up his image before her.

"Her Majesty will be very angry, madame, if she recognised him. I saw her questioning the Duke, his father, and pointing towards him as he disappeared into the wood," answers Charlotte, with the slightest expression of bitterness in her well-modulated voice.

"Henry has discovered," continues Marguerite, still so lost in reverie that she does not heed her remark, "that the Queen has a masque to-night on the river. He will be disguised, he tells me, as a Venetian nobleman, in a yellow brocaded robe, with a violet mantle, and a red mask. He will wear my colours—blue, heavenly blue, the symbol of hope and faith—on his shoulder-knot. Our watchword is to be 'Eternal love.'"

"Holy Virgin!" exclaims Charlotte, with alarm, laying her hand on Marguerite's shoulder, "your highness will not dare to meet him?"

"Be silent, *petite sotte*," breaks in the Princess. "We are to meet on the southern bank of the river. Charlotte, you must help me; I shall be sure to be watched, but I must escape from the Queen by some device. Change my dress, and then—and then——" and she turns her laughing eyes on the alarmed face of Charlotte, "under the shady woods, by the parterre near the grotto, I shall meet him—and, alone."

"And what on earth am I to say to the Queen if she asks for your highness?" replies Charlotte, turning away her face that the Princess might not see the tears that bedew her cheeks.

"Anything, my good Charlotte; you have a ready wit, or my mother would not favour you. I trust to your invention, it has been often exercised," and she looks archly at her. "Tell the Queen that I am fatigued and have retired into the château until the banquet, when I will rejoin her Majesty. There is no fear, *ma mie*, especially as the Comte de Clermont is at Chenonceau. Her Majesty, stern and silent though she be, unbends to him and greatly affects his company," and she laughs softly and points towards the closed door.

"I trust there is, indeed, no fear of discovery, Princess," returns Charlotte; "for her

Majesty would never forgive me." At which Marguerite laughs again.

"Princess," says Charlotte, looking very grave, and seating herself on a stool at her feet, "tell me truly, do you love the Duc de Guise?" Charlotte's fine eyes are fixed intently on Marguerite as she asks this question.

"*Peste!* you know I do. He is as great a hero as Rinaldo in the Italian poet's romance of 'Orlando.' Somewhat sedate, perhaps, for me, but so handsome, spite of that scar. I even love that scar, Charlotte."

"Does the Duke love you?" again asks Charlotte, with a trembling voice.

"*Par exemple!* do you think the man lives who would not return my love?" and the young Princess colours, and tosses the masses of waving brown curls back from her brow, staring at her companion in unfeigned astonishment.

"I was thinking," continues Charlotte, avoiding her gaze and speaking in a peculiar voice, "I was thinking of that poor La Molle, left alone in Paris. How jealous he was! You loved him well, madame, a week ago."

"Bah! that is ancient history — we are at Chenonceau now. When I return to Paris it is possible I may console him. Poor La Molle! one

cannot be always constant. Charlotte," said the Princess, after a pause, looking inquisitively at her, "I believe you are in love with the Balafré yourself."

Charlotte colours, and, not daring to trust her voice in reply, shakes her head and bends her eyes on the ground.

Marguerite, too much occupied with her own thoughts to take much heed of her friend's emotion, pats her fondly on the cheek, and proceeds—

"You are dull, *ma mie;* amuse yourself like me, now with one, then with another. Be constant to none. Regard your own interest and inclination only. But leave Guise alone; he is my passion. His proud reserve pleases me. His stately devotion touches me. He is a king among men. I love to torment the hero of Jarnac and Moncontour. He is jealous too—jealous of the very air I breathe; but in time, that may become wearisome. I never thought of that," adds she, musing.

"Your highness will marry soon," says Charlotte, rising and facing the Princess, "and then Guise must console himself——"

"With you, *par exemple, belle des belles?* You need not blush so, Charlotte, I read your secret. But, *ma mie*, I mean to marry Henri de Guise

myself, even if my mother and the King, my brother, refuse their consent. They may beat me —imprison me—or banish me; I will still marry Henri de Guise."

"Her Majesty will never consent to this alliance, madame."

"You are jealous, Charlotte, or you would not say so. Why should I not marry him, when my sister-in-law, the young Queen of Scots, is of the House of Lorraine?"

"Yes, madame, but the case is altogether different; she is a Queen-regnant. The house of Lorraine is already too powerful."

"Ah!" exclaims the volatile Marguerite, starting up, "I love freedom; freedom in life, freedom in love. Charlotte, you say truly, I shall never be constant."

"Then, alas, for your husband! He *must* love you, and you will break his heart."

"Husband! I will have no husband but Henri de Guise. Guise or a convent. I should make an enchanting nun!" And she laughs a low merry laugh, springs to her feet, and turns a pirouette on the floor. "I think the dress would suit me. I would write Latin elegies on all my old lovers."

"You will hear somewhat of that, madame, later

from the Queen," Charlotte replies, with a triumphant air. "A husband is chosen for you already."

"Who? Who is he?"

"You will learn from her Majesty very shortly."

"Charlotte, if you do not tell me this instant, I will never forgive you;" and Marguerite suddenly becomes grave and reseats herself. "Next time you want my help I won't move a finger."

"I dare not tell you, madame."

"Then I will tell Guise to-night you are in love with him," cries she, reddening with anger.

"Oh, Princess," exclaims Charlotte, sinking at her feet, and seizing her hand; "you would not be so cruel!"

"But I will, unless you tell me."

At this moment, when Marguerite was dragging her friend beside her on the sofa, determined to obtain an avowal from her almost by force, the low door opens, and Catherine stands before them.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A DUTIFUL DAUGHTER.

The two girls were startled and visibly trembled; but, recovering from their fright, rose and made their obeisance. For a moment Catherine gazed earnestly at them, as if divining the reason of their discomposure; then beckoning to the Princess, she led her daughter into her writing room, where she seated herself beside a table covered with dispatches and papers.

"My daughter," said the Queen, contemplating Marguerite with satisfaction, as the Princess stood before her, her cheeks flushed by the fright that Catherine's sudden entrance had occasioned. "I have commanded a masque to-night on the river, and a banquet in the water-gallery, to celebrate my return. You will attend me and be careful not to leave me, my child. Strangers have been seen among the woods. Did you not mark one as we approached riding near us?" And Catherine gave

a searching glance at Marguerite. "I have given strict orders that all strangers (Huguenots, probably, with evil designs upon his Majesty) shall be arrested and imprisoned."

Again Catherine turned her piercing eyes upon Marguerite, who suddenly grew very pale.

"My daughter, you seem indisposed, the heat has overcome you—be seated."

Marguerite sank into a chair near the door. She knew that her mother had recognised the Duke, and that it would be infinitely difficult to keep her appointment with him that evening. Neither mother nor daughter spoke for some moments. Catherine was studying the effect of her words on Marguerite, and Marguerite was endeavouring to master her agitation. When the Queen next addressed her, the Princess was still pale but perfectly composed.

"My daughter, you passed much of your time before you left the Louvre with the Comte la Molle. I know he is highly favoured by my son, Anjou. Does his company amuse you?"

Marguerite's cheeks became scarlet.

"Your Majesty has ever commanded me," replied she in a firm voice, "to converse with those young nobles whom you and my brother, the King, have called to the Court."

"True, my child, you have done so, I acknowledge freely, and, by such gracious bearing you have, doubtless, forwarded his Majesty's interests." There was again silence. "Our cousin, the young Duc Henri de Guise, is also much in your company," Catherine said at length, speaking very slowly and turning her eyes full upon Marguerite who, for an instant, returned her gaze boldly. "I warn you, Marguerite, that neither the King my son, nor I, will tolerate more alliances with the ambitious House of Lorraine. They stand too near the throne already."

Marguerite during this speech did not look up, not daring to meet the steadfast glance of the Queen.

"Surely," said she, speaking low, "your Majesty has been prejudiced against the Duke by my brother Charles. His Majesty hates him. He is jealous of him."

"My child, speak with more respect of his Majesty."

"Madame, the King has threatened to beat me if I dared to love the Duc de Guise. But I am your Majesty's own child," and Marguerite turned towards Catherine caressingly. "I fear not threats." Catherine smiled and curiously observed her. "But

your Majesty surely forgets," continued Marguerite warmly, "that our cousin of Guise is the chief pillar of the throne, a hero who, at sixteen, vanquished Coligni at Poitiers; and that at Massignac and Jarnac, in company with my brother Anjou, he performed prodigies of valour."

"My daughter, I forget nothing. You appear to have devoted much study to the life of the Duke —our cousin. It is a brilliant page in our history. I have, however, other projects for you. You must support the throne by a royal marriage."

"Oh! madame!" exclaimed Marguerite, heaving a deep sigh, and clasping her hands as she looked imploringly at her mother, who proceeded to address her as though unconscious of this appeal.

"Avoid Henri de Guise, Princess. I have already remonstrated with his father on his uninvited presence here, of which he professes entire ignorance—for he *is here*, and you know it, Marguerite"—and she shot an angry glance at the embarrassed Princess. "Avoid the Duke, I say, and let me see you attended less often by La Molle, or I must remove him from the Court."

"Madame!" cried Marguerite, turning white, and looking greatly alarmed, well knowing what this *removal* meant; "I will obey your commands.

But whom, may I ask, do you propose for my husband? Unless I can choose a husband for myself" —and she hesitated, for the Queen bent her eyes sternly upon her and frowned—"I do not care to marry at all," she added in a low voice.

"Possibly you may not, my daughter. But his Majesty and the council have decided otherwise. Your hand must ultimately seal a treaty, important to the King, your brother, in order to reconcile conflicting creeds and to conciliate a powerful party."

All this time Marguerite had stood speechless before the Queen. At this last sentence, fatal to her hopes of marrying the Duc de Guise, the leader of the Catholic party, her lips parted as if to speak, but she restrained herself and was silent.

"The daughters of France," said Catherine, lifting her eyes to the ceiling, "do not consider personal feelings in marriage, but the good of the kingdom. My child, you are to marry very shortly the King of Navarre. I propose journeying myself to the Castle of Nérac to conclude a treaty with my sister, Queen Jeanne, his mother. Henri de Béarn will demand your hand. He will be accepted when an alliance is concluded between the Queen of Navarre and myself."

"But, my mother," answered Marguerite, stepping forward in her excitement, "he is a heretic. I am very Catholic. Surely your Majesty will not force me——"

"You will convert him," replied Catherine.

"*But, madame, the Prince is not to my taste. He is rough and unpolished. He is a mountaineer —a Béarnois.*"

"My daughter, he will be your husband. Now, Marguerite, listen to me. This marriage is indispensable for reasons of state. The King, your brother, and I myself like the King of Navarre as little as you do. That little kingdom in the valleys of the Pyrenees is a thorn in our side which we must pluck out. Those pestilent and accursed heretics must be destroyed. We call them to our Court; we lodge them in the Louvre—not for love, Marguerite—not for love. Have patience, my daughter. I cannot unfold to you the secrets of the council; but it is possible that Henry of Navarre may not live long. Life is in the hands of God,—and of the King." She added in a lower voice. "Console yourself. A day is coming that will purge France of Huguenots; and if Henry do not accept the mass——"

"Madame," said Marguerite archly (who had

eagerly followed her mother's words), "I trust that the service of his Majesty will not require me to *convert* the King of Navarre?"

"No, Princess," said Catherine, with a sinister smile. "My daughter," continued she, "your dutiful obedience pleases me. The King may, in the event of your marriage, create new posts of honour about the King of Navarre while he lives. Monsieur La Molle, a most accomplished gentleman, shall be remembered. *Au revoir*, Princess. Send Charlotte de Presney to me. Go to your apartments, and prepare for the masque on the river I have commanded to-night in honour of our arrival."

So Marguerite, full of thought, curtseying low before her mother, kissed her hand, and retired to her apartments.

As the sun sets and the twilight deepens, torch after torch lights up the river and the adjacent woods. Every window in the château is illuminated, and great beacon-fires flash out from the turrets. The sound of a lute, the refrain of a song, a snatch from a hunting-chorus, are borne upon the breeze, as, one by one, painted barges shoot out from under the arches of the bridge along the current.

As night advances the forest on both sides of the

river is all ablaze. On the southern bank, where the parterre is divided from the woods by marble balustrades, statues and hedges of clipped yew, festoons of coloured lamps hang from tree to tree, and fade away into sylvan bowers deep among the tangled coppice. The fountains, cunningly lit from below, flash up in streams of liquid fire. Each tiny streamlet that crosses the mossy lawns is a thread of gold. Tents of satin and velvet, fringed with gold, border broad alleys and marble terraces of dazzling whiteness. The river, bright as at midday with the light of thousands of torches, is covered with gondolas and fantastic barques. Some are shaped like birds—swans, parrots, and peacocks; others resemble shells, and butterflies whose expanded wings of glittering stuff form the sails. All are filled with maskers habited in every device of quaint disguisement. Not a face or form is to be recognised. See how gaily the fairy fleet cleaves the water, now dashing into deep shadows, now lingering in the torchlight that glances on the rich silks and grotesque features of the maskers. Yonder a whole boat's crew is entangled among the water lilies that thickly fringe the banks under the over-arching willows. Some disembark among the fountains, or mount the

broad marble steps leading to the arcades; some descend to saunter far away into the illuminated woods. Others, tired of the woods, are re-embarking on the river. In the centre of the stream is a barge with a raised platform covered with velvet embroidered in gold, on which are placed the Queen's musicians, who wake the far-off echoes with joyous symphonies. Beyond, in the woods, are maskers who dance under silken hangings spread among the overhanging branches of giant oaks, or recline upon cushions piled upon rich carpets beside tables covered with choice wines, fruit and confectionery. The merry laughter of these revellers mixes with strains of voluptuous music from flutes and flageolets, played by concealed musicians placed in pavilion-orchestras hidden among the underwood, tempting onwards those who desire to wander into the dark and lonely recesses of the forest.

Among the crowd which thickly gathers on the parterre, a tall man of imposing figure, habited in a Venetian dress of yellow satin and wrapped in a cloak of the same colour, paces up and down. He is alone and impatient. He wears a red mask; conspicuous on his right shoulder is a knot of blue and silver ribbons. As each boat

approaches to discharge its gay freight upon the bank he eagerly advances and mixes with the company. Then, as though disappointed, he returns into the shadow thrown by the portico of a shell grotto. Wearied with waiting, he seats himself upon the turf. "She will not come!" he says, and then sinks back against a tree and covers his face with his hands. The fountains throw up columns of fiery spray; the soft music sighs in the distance; crowds of fluttering maskers pace up and down the plots of smooth grass or linger on the terrace—still he sits and waits.

A soft hand touches him, and a sweet voice whispers "Eternal love!" It is the Princess, who, disguised in a black domino procured by Charlotte de Presney, has escaped from the Queen-mother and stands before him.

For an instant she unmasks and turns her lustrous eyes upon him.

Henri de Guise (for it is he) leaps to his feet. He kneels before her and kisses her hands. "Oh! my Princess, what condescension!" he murmurs in a low voice. "I trembled lest I had been too bold. I feared that my letter had not reached you."

A gay laugh answers his broken sentences.

"My cousin, will you promise to take on your

soul all the lies I have told my mother in order to meet you?"

"I will absolve you, madame."

"Ah, my cousin, I have ill news! My mother and the King are determined to marry me to the King of Navarre."

"Impossible!" exclaims the Duke; "it would be sacrilege!"

"Oh, Henry!" replies the Princess in a pleading voice and laying her hand upon his arm, "my cousin, bravest among the brave, swear by your own sword you will save me from this detestable heretic!"

The Duke did not answer, but gently drew her near the entrance of the grotto. It was now late, and the lights within had grown dim. "Marguerite," he says, in a voice trembling with passion, "come where I may adore you as my living goddess—come where I may conjure you to give me a right to defend you. Say but one word and to-morrow I will ask your hand in marriage; the King dare not refuse me."

"Alas! my cousin, my mother's will is absolute."

"It is a vile conspiracy!" cries the Duke, in great agitation. "The House of Lorraine, my

Princess, save but for the Crown, is as great as your own. My uncle, the Cardinal, shall appeal to the Holy See. Marguerite, do but love me, and I will never leave you! Marguerite, hear me!" He seizes her hands—he presses her in his arms, drawing her each moment deeper into the recesses of the grotto. As they disappear, a voice is heard without, calling softly—

"Madame! Madame Marguerite! for the love of heaven, come, come!"

In an instant the spell is broken. Marguerite extricates herself from the arms of the Duke and rushes forward.

It is Charlotte de Presney, disguised like herself in a black domino. "Not a moment is to be lost," she says hurriedly. "Her Majesty has three times asked for your highness. She supposes I am in the château seeking you." Charlotte's voice is unsteady. She wore her mask to conceal her face, for it was bathed in tears.

In an instant she and the Princess, followed by the Duke, cross the terrace to where a boat is moored under the shade of some willows and are lost in the crowd.

The Duke dashes into the darkest recesses of the forest, and is seen no more.

CHAPTER XIX.

BEFORE THE STORM.

HENRY, King of Navarre, accompanied by the Prince de Condé and his wife and attended by eight hundred Huguenot gentlemen dressed in black (for his mother, Queen Jeanne, had died suddenly at Paris, while he was on the road), had just arrived at the Louvre to claim the hand of the Princess Marguerite. The two Princes and the Princesse de Condé are received with royal honours and much effusion of compliments by King Charles and Catherine, and are lodged in the Palace of the Louvre. Whatever Marguerite's feelings are, she carefully conceals them. Insinuating, adroit, clever, gifted with a facile pen and a flattering tongue, she is too ambitious to resist, too volatile to be constant. She lives in a world of intrigue, as she tells us in her memoirs, and piquing herself on being "so Catholic, so devoted to the 'sacred faith of her fathers,'" and she pendulates

between Henri de Guise and La Molle, amid a thousand other flirtations. She lives in a family divided against itself. Sometimes she takes part with the Duc d'Anjou and watches the Queen-mother in his interests, in order to report every word she says to him; or she quarrels with d'Anjou and swears eternal friendship with her youngest brother, d'Alençon — all his life the puppet of endless political conspiracies; or she abuses the King (Charles) because he listens to her enemy, De Gaust, and tells her that she shall never marry the Duc de Guise, because she would reveal all the secrets of state to him and make the House of Lorraine more dangerous than it is already. This greatest princess of Europe, young and beautiful, a "noble mind in a lovely person," as Brantôme says of her, is agitated, unhappy, and lonely. "Let it never be said," writes she, "that marriages are made in heaven; God is not so unjust. All yesterday my room echoed with talk of weddings. How can I purge it?"

The Duc de Guise no longer whispers in her ear "Eternal love." The great Balafré, stern in resolve, firm in affection, is disgusted at her *légèreté*. He has ceased even to be jealous. His mind is now occupied by those religious

intrigues which he developed later as leader of the Holy Catholic League. Guise dislikes and distrusts the Valois race. He especially abhors their unholy coquetting with heretics in the matter of Marguerite's approaching marriage. He has now adopted the motto of the House of Lorraine, "Death to the Valois! Guise upon the throne!" Moreover he looks with favour on a widow—the Princesse de Porcian, whom he marries soon after. Guise only remains at Court to fulfil the vow of vengeance he has sworn against Coligni for his suspected connivance in the murder of his illustrious father, Francis of Guise, of which accusation Coligni could never clear himself.[1] The great Admiral is now at Court. He is loaded with favours. Charles IX. has requested his constant attendance at the council to arrange the details of a war with Spain. He has also made him a present of a thousand francs. The friends of Coligni warn him to beware. His comrade and friend Montmorenci refuses to leave Chantilly. The Admiral, more honest than astute, is completely duped. It is darkly whispered among the Catholics that revenge is at hand, and that the Protestant princes and Coligni are shortly coming to their death.

[1] See Note 11.

It is said also that the marriage liveries of the Princess will be "crimson," and that "more blood than wine will flow at the marriage feast."

And the Queen? Serene and gracious, she moves with her accustomed majesty among these conflicting parties. She neither sees, nor hears, nor knows aught that shall disarrange her projects. Silent, inscrutable, her hands hold the threads of life. Within her brain is determined the issue of events. Her son Charles is a puppet in her hands. This once frank, witty, brave, artistic youth, who formerly loved verses and literature,—when not a roaring Nimrod among the royal forests,—is morose, cruel, and suspicious; convinced that the whole world is playing him false, all perjured but his mother. She has told him, and she has darkly hinted in the council, that events are approaching a crisis. She has secured the present support of the young Duc de Guise and the powerful House of Lorraine, ever foremost when Catholic interests are at stake. She can now sit down calmly and marshal each act in the coming drama, as a general can marshal those regiments which are to form his battle-front. Fifteen hundred Protestants were slaughtered at Amboise alone, but there are thousands upon thousands remaining, and she has pro-

mised Philip II., her awful son-in-law, and his minister the Duke of Alva, that she will cut off the head of heresy within the realm of France. She has tried both parties, intrigued with both—with Coligni and the Condés, with Guise and the Cardinal de Lorraine, and she finds that at present orthodoxy answers her purpose best.

Besides, there is personal hatred, fear, and offence towards the Huguenots. Did not Coligni dare to criticize her government at the Council of Amboise? Did not Condé (that cautious Bourbon) escape her? The King of Navarre, too, her future son-in-law, is he to be lured to Court and married to the fascinating Marguerite for *nothing?* Has not Ruggiero shown her that his life crossed the life of her sons? Does she not hate him? Is he not adored by the people, who, grown cold towards the House of Valois, extol his vigour, courage, and ability? Yes, he shall marry. Then he shall die along with all rebels, heretics, and traitors! A general massacre of the Huguenots throughout France can alone satisfy her longings and secure Charles on the throne.

Thus came to be planned that most tremendous crime, fixed for the festival of St. Bartholomew, ostensibly for the triumph of the Catholic Church,

but in reality to compass the death of the Queen's political enemies—Navarre, Condé, and Coligni—and to crush the freedom of thought and opinion brought in by liberty of conscience and a purer faith.

This was the Court to which Henry of Navarre came, to be lodged under the roof of the Louvre, and to marry the Princess Marguerite!

The marriage took place on the 18th of August, 1572, at Notre-Dame.[1] The outspoken Charles had said that, in giving his sister *Margot* to the King of Navarre, he gave her to all the Huguenots in his kingdom. The Princess tells us she wore a royal crown and a state mantle of blue velvet, wrought with gold embroidery, four yards long. It was held up by three princesses; and she further wore a corset, forming the body of her dress, covered with brilliants and the crown jewels. The streets through which she passed were dressed with scaffoldings, lined with cloth of gold, to accommodate the spectators, all the way from the Archbishop's palace to Notre-Dame.

A few nights after, Admiral Coligni was shot at, with an arquebuse, by an assassin standing at a barred window in the street of the Fossés Saint-

[1] See Note 12.

Germain, as he returned from playing a game of rackets with the King, at the Louvre, to his lodgings at the Hôtel de Saint-Pierre, in the Rue Béthisy. He was walking along slowly reading a paper; the finger of his right hand was broken, and he was otherwise grievously wounded. The assassin, Maurévert, was a fellow known to be in the pay of Henri, Duc de Guise. The house from which the shot was fired belonged to the Duke's tutor. The King of Navarre and Condé were overcome at the news. Charles IX., along with the Queen-mother, visited the Admiral next day and stayed an hour with him. Before leaving, Charles folded him in his arms and wept. "You, my father," he said, "have the wound, but I suffer the pain. By the light of God, I will so avenge this act that it shall be a warning as long as the world lasts."

A few hours after the shot was fired, the Huguenot chiefs assembled in Navarre's apartments to deliberate what means should be taken to punish the assassin. About the same time a secret council was called by the Queen-mother, to decide whether or no Navarre and Condé should be assassinated. Charles IX., the Duc de Guise—who, however hostile otherwise, joins issue to destroy Navarre and Condé—Anjou, Nevers, and

d'Angoulême were present. It was resolved that the King of Navarre and the Prince de Condé should die, and that the massacre should take place that very night, before the Huguenots—alarmed by the attempt on Coligni—had time to concert measures of defence. Under pretence of protecting them from further violence, all hotels and lodging-houses were diligently searched, and a list made of the name, age, and condition of every Protestant in Paris. Orders were also given for the troops to be under arms, during the coming night, throughout the city. Every outlet and portal of the Louvre were closed and guarded by Swiss Guards, commanded by Cossein. The Hôtel de Saint-Pierre, in the Rue Béthisy, where Coligni lay, was also surrounded by troops, "for his safety," it was said. No one could go in or out. At a given signal, the tocsin was to sound from all places where a bell was hung. Chains were to be drawn across the streets and bonfires lighted. White cockades, stitched on a narrow white band to be bound round the right arm, were distributed, in order that the Catholics might be recognised in the darkness. The secret, known to hundreds, was well kept; the Huguenots were utterly unprepared. "No one told me anything," said Mar-

guerite.[1] "They knew that I was too humane not to tell. But the evening before, being present at the coucher of my mother the Queen, and sitting on a coffer near my sister Claude, who seemed very sad, the Queen, who was talking to some one, looked round and saw I was not gone. She desired me to retire to bed. As I was making my obeisance to her, my sister took me by the arm and stopped me. Then sobbing violently she said, 'Good God, sister, do not go!' This alarmed me exceedingly. The Queen, my mother, was watching us, and, looking very angry, called my sister to her and scolded her severely. She peremptorily desired her to say no more to me. Claude replied that it was not fair to sacrifice me like that, and that danger might come to me.

"'Never mind,' said the Queen. 'Please God, no danger will come to her; but she must go to bed at once in order to raise no suspicions.' But Claude still disputed with her, although I did not hear their words. The Queen again turned to me angrily and commanded me to go. My sister, continuing her sobs, bade me 'good night.' I dared ask no questions. So, cold and trembling, without the least idea of what was the matter, I

[1] See Note 13.

went to my rooms and to my closet, where I prayed to God to save me from I knew not what. The King, my husband, who had not come to bed, sent word to me to do so." (They occupied the same room, she tells us, but separate beds.) "I could not close my eyes all night," she adds; "thinking of my sister's agitation, and sure that something dreadful was coming. Before daylight my husband got up. He came to my bed-side, kissed me, and said that he was going to play a game of rackets before the King was awake. He said he would have justice in the matter of the attempt on the Admiral's life. Then he left the room. I, seeing the daylight, and overcome by sleep, told my nurse to shut the door, that I might rest longer."

This took place on Saturday evening, the 23rd of August, being the eve of St. Bartholomew.

CHAPTER XX.

ST. BARTHOLOMEW.

A SIGNAL sounded from the belfry of Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois. It was answered by the great bell of the Palace of Justice on the opposite bank of the Seine. Catherine and her two sons, Charles IX. and the Duc d'Anjou, had risen long before daylight. Catherine dared not leave Charles to himself. He was suddenly grown nervous and irresolute. He might yet countermand everything. Within a small closet over the gate of the Louvre, facing the quays, the mother and her two sons huddled together. Charles was tallest of the three. The window was open; it was still dark; the streets were empty; not a sound was heard save the crashing of the bells. They listened to the wild clamour without; but not a word was spoken in the room. Catherine felt Charles tremble. She clutched him tightly, and, dreading to hear the echo of her own voice, she

whispered in his ear, "My son, God has given this opportunity into your hands. Let it not escape you."

"*Mort de Dieu*, mother, do you take me for a coward?" whispered back Charles, still trembling.

Suddenly a shot was fired on the Quays. The three conspirators started as if the weapon had been levelled against themselves.

"Whence this pistol shot came, who fired it, or if it wounded any one, I know not," writes the Duc d'Anjou, who as well as his sister has left an account of the massacre; "but this I know, that the report struck terror into our very souls. We were seized with such sudden dread at the horrors we had ourselves invoked, that even the Queen-mother was dismayed. She dispatched one of the King's gentlemen who waited without, to command the Duc de Guise to stay all proceedings and not to attack Admiral Coligni." This counter order came too late. The Duke had already left his house.

All the bells in Paris were now ringing furiously; the quays and streets were rapidly filling with citizens bearing flambeaux. Multitudes came pouring in from every opening, every window was filled with persons holding lights, and the cracking of firearms, loud curses, piercing screams and wild

laughter were heard on every side. In the midst of this uproar, Henri de Guise, thirsting for revenge upon the supposed murderer of his father, accompanied by Nevers and d'Angoulême, and a company of Catholic nobles, made his way to the Hôtel Saint-Pierre, in the Rue Béthisy, where Coligni lodged.

Coligni, who had the night before been embraced by his sovereign, lay asleep on his bed. Some of his Protestant friends, Guerchi, Teligny, with Cornaton and Labonne his gentlemen, who had hastened to him upon the news of the attempted assassination, lingered in the ante-room. Paré, the surgeon who had dressed his wounds, had not yet left the hotel. The Admiral had been conversing with him and with his chaplain Merlin, who had offered up a thanksgiving for his deliverance. Within the court five Swiss Guards stood behind the outer doors; without, in the darkness of the night, crouched Cossein with fifty arquebusiers, who had been gained over by the Duc de Guise.

Suddenly, in the stillness of the night a voice is heard calling from without, "Open the door—open in the name of the King!" At the King's name the street-door is immediately unbarred; Cossein and his men rush in, poniard the five guards,

break open the inner door, and dash up the stairs. The noise disturbs Cornaton, who descends the stairs; he is pushed violently backwards amid cries of "*De par le Roi!*" Now the whole house is aroused, Merlin has risén, and Coligni awakened from his sleep, calls loudly from the door of his room, "Cornaton, what does this noise mean?" "My dear Lord," cries Cornaton hurrying up to him, wringing his hands, "it means that it is God who summons you! The hall below is carried by your enemies—Cossein is a traitor—we cannot save you—we have no means of defence!"

"I understand," replies Coligni unmoved. "It is a plot to destroy me now that I am wounded and cannot defend myself. I have long been prepared to die. I recommend my soul to God. Cornaton, Merlin, and the others, if the doors are forced, you cannot save me, save yourselves." Coligni returns to his room.

By this time the Admiral's retainers are aroused and enter his chamber, but no sooner does he repeat the words, "Save yourselves, you cannot save me," than they lose not a moment in escaping to the leads of the house. One man only remains with his master; his name is Nicolas Muso.

Meanwhile Cossein, heavily mailed and sword in hand, having slain all he has found in his way, is on the landing. Besme, a page of the Duc de Guise, Attin, and Sarbaloux are with him; they force open the door of Coligni's room.

The Admiral, his long white hair falling about his shoulders, is seated in an arm-chair. There is a majesty about him even thus wounded, unarmed and alone, that daunts his assailants. The traitor Cossein falls back. Besme advances brandishing his sword.

"Are you Admiral Coligni?" he cries.

"I am," replies the veteran, following with his eyes the motion of the sword. "Young man, respect my grey hairs and my infirmities," and he signs to his arm bound up and swathed to his side. Besme makes a pass at him. "If I could have died by the hands of a gentleman and not of this varlet!" exclaims the Admiral. Besme for answer plunges his sword up to the hilt into Coligni's breast.

A voice is now heard from without under the window—"Besme, you are very long; is all over?"

"All is over," answers Besme, thrusting his head out and displaying his bloody sword.

"Sirrah, here is the Duc de Guise, and I, the

Chevalier d'Angoulême. We will not believe it until we see the body. Fling it out of the window, like a good lad."

With some difficulty the corpse is raised and thrown into the street below. The gashed and bleeding remains of the old hero fall heavily upon the pavement. Henri de Guise stoops down to feast his eyes upon his enemy. The features are so veiled with blood he cannot recognise him. He takes out his handkerchief and wipes the wrinkled face clean. "I know you now—Admiral Coligni," says he, "and I spurn you. Lie there, thou poisonous old serpent that murdered my father. Thou shalt shed no more venom, reptile!" and he kicks the corpse into a corner, amidst the dirt and mud of the thoroughfare. (Coligni's dead body[1] is carried to the gallows at Montfaucon, where it hangs by the feet from a chain of iron.) Guise then turns to the fifty arquebusiers behind him. "En avant—en avant, mes enfants!" he shouts; "you have made a good beginning—set upon the others—slaughter them all—men, women—even infants at the breast—cut them down." Sword in hand Guise rushes through the streets with Nevers, d'Angoulême, and Tavannes,

[1] See Note 14.

as well as Gondi and De Retz, who have now joined him, at his back.

Meanwhile, Marguerite de Valois was awakened by some one beating violently with feet and hands against her door crying out, "Navarre! Navarre!". "My nurse," writes she, "thinking it was the King, ran and opened the door; but it was M. de Séran, grievously wounded and closely pursued by four archers, who cried out, 'Kill him! kill him! spare no one.' De Séran threw himself on my bed to save himself. I, not knowing who he was, jumped out, and he with me, holding by me tightly. We both screamed loudly, and I was as frightened as he was, but God sent M. de Nançay, Captain of the Guards, who finding me in this condition, could not help laughing. He drove the archers out and spared the life of this man, whom I put to bed in my closet and kept there till he was well. I changed my night-dress, which was covered with blood. M. de Nançay assured me that my husband was safe and with the King. He threw over me a cloak; and took me to my sister Claude, in whose room I arrived more dead than alive; specially so when, as I set my foot in the ante-chamber, a gentleman named Bourse dropped, pierced by a ball, dead at my feet. I fell

fainting into the arms of M. de Nançay, thinking I was killed also. A little recovered, I went into the small room beyond where my sister slept. While I was there, two gentlemen-in-waiting, who attended my husband, rushed in, imploring me to save their lives. So I went to the King and to the Queen, my brother and my mother, and falling on my knees begged that these gentlemen might be spared, which was granted to me."

"Having," continues Marguerite, "failed in the principal purpose, *which was not so much against the Huguenots as against the Princes of the blood—the King my husband, and the Prince of Condé*—the Queen, my mother, came to me and '*asked me to break my marriage.*' But I replied that I would not; being sure that she only proposed this in order to murder my husband."[1]

The magic mirror of Ruggiero had revealed the truth; Henry of Navarre led a charmed life. Of his escape, against the express command of the all-powerful Catherine, various accounts are related. He is said to have been saved by his wife, but of this *she* says nothing. It is believed on good authority that, with the Prince de Condé, he went out unusually early, before daybreak even, in

[1] See Note 15.

order to prepare for playing that identical game of rackets, of which he spoke to Marguerite and which probably saved his life. When it was discovered that these two princes, Condé and Navarre, were both alive, they were summoned to the King's presence. They find Charles, arquebuse in hand, within the same small closet over the gate of the Louvre. He has been there since daybreak. A page stands by him, ready to reload his weapon. He is mad with exultation and excitement, and leans out of window to watch the crowds of fugitives rush by and to shout to the Swiss Guards below—"Kill—kill all—cut them all in pieces! "*Pardieu!* see," he roars out pointing to the river, "there is a fellow yonder escaping. By the mass, look—one, two, three—they are swimming across the Seine—at them, at them—take good aim—shoot them down, the carrion!" Volleys of shot are the reply. Charles had recovered his nerves; he now looks on Huguenots as game, and has been potting them with remarkable precision from the window. With hideous mirth, he boasts to Navarre and Condé how many heretics he has brought down with his own hand. He counts upon his fingers the names of the Huguenot chiefs already slaughtered. He yells with fiendish

laughter when he describes how Coligni, whom the night before he had called "father," looked when dead. "By the light of God, it is a royal chase!" shrieks Charles, as the page quickly reloads his arquebuse. "That last shot was excellent. Not a heretic shall be left in France." Again he points his gun and shoots; a piercing cry follows. Charles nods his head approvingly. "We will have them all—babies and their mothers. 'Break the eggs and the nest will rot.' Our mother says well—we must reign. We will no longer be contradicted by our subjects. We will teach them to revere us as the image of the living God. You, Princes,"—and as he turns to address the King of Navarre and Condé, his tall, gaunt figure, distorted countenance, bleared and bloodshot eyes, and matted hair are repulsive to look upon—"You, Princes, I have called hither, out of compassion for your youth, to give you a chance for your lives, *as you are alive*,—but by the holy Oriflamme, *I thought you were both dead already*. You are, both of you, rebels, and the sons of rebels. You must instantly recant and enter the true Church or die. So down on your knees, both of you. Purge yourselves from your accursed sect. Give me your parole, and your swords too, Princes, that

you will not leave the Louvre; or, *Dieu des Dieux*, you shall be massacred like the rest!"

Thus did Henry IV. and the Prince de Condé escape death, unknown to, and contrary to the express orders of Catherine.

Without, Paris is a charnel-house. The streets are choked up by murdered Huguenots. Carts and litters full of dead bodies, huddled together in a hideous medley, rumble along the rough causeways, to be shot into the Seine. The river runs red with blood; its current is dammed up with corpses. But the Court is merry. Catherine triumphs. Her ladies—*la petite bande de la Reine*—go forth and pick their way in the gory mud, to scrutinise the dead, piled in heaps against the walls and in the courts of the Louvre, to recognise friends or lovers.

On the 6th September the news of the massacre reaches Rome by letters from the Nuncio. Gregory XIII. commands solemn masses and thanksgivings to God for the event. The cannon of St. Angelo booms over the papal city; *feux de joie* are fired in the principal streets; a medal is struck; a jubilee is published; a legate is sent into France; a procession, in which the Pope, Cardinals, and Ministers to the See of Rome appear, visit the

great Basilicas; the Cardinal de Lorraine, uncle to the Balafré, then at Rome, is present, and in the name of his master, Charles IX., congratulates his Holiness on the efficacy of his prayers these *seventeen years past* for the destruction of heretics.

Blood calls for blood![1] Charles IX., whose royal mandate authorised the massacre (which lasted seven days and seven nights), falls sick two years after at the Castle of Vincennes. "I know not what has befallen me," he says to his surgeon, Ambrose Paré; "my mind and body both burn with fever. Asleep or awake, I see the mangled Huguenots pass before me. They drip with blood; they make hideous faces at me; they point to their open wounds and mock me. Holy Virgin! I wish, Paré, I had spared the old and the infirm and the infants at the breast." Aged twenty-four, Charles died, abhorring the mother whose counsels had led him to this execrable deed—abhorring her so intensely that he could not even bear her in his sight. In her place he called for the King of Navarre, and confided to him his last wishes. He died, poor misguided youth, piously thanking God that he left no children. The blood actually oozed from the pores of his skin. His cries and screams were horrible.

[1] See Note 16.

Thus another King of France passed into the world of spirits, bringing Henry of Navarre one step nearer the throne. Charles, according to the prediction of Ruggiero, died young, bathed in his own blood.

And Catherine? Calm, undaunted, still handsome, she inaugurated a new reign—that of her third and best beloved son, Henri, Duc d'Anjou and King of Poland, popularly known by the style and title of Henry III., "*by the favour of his mother inert King of France.*"

CHAPTER XXI.

THE END OF CATHERINE DE MEDICI.

FIFTEEN years have passed. The Queen-mother is now seventy. She suffers from a mortal disease, and lies sick at the Château of Blois.

Hither her son Henry III. and his Court have come to meet the States-General. Trouble is in the kingdom; for the great Balafré, supported by Rome and Spain, is in rebellion; Henry totters on his throne.

And what a throne! What a monarch! Henry, who in his youth was learned, elegant, sober, who fought at Jarnac and Moncontour[1] like a Paladin, has become effeminate, superstitious, and vicious. His sceptre is a cup-and-ball; his sword, a tuft of feathers; he paints and dresses like a woman, covers himself with jewels, and passes his time in arranging ecclesiastical processions, or in festivals, pageants, masques, and banquets. His four

[1] See Note 17.

favourites ("minions" they are called, and also "beggars," from their greed and extravagance), De Joyeuse, d'Epernon, Schomberg, and Maugiron, govern him and the kingdom. They are handsome and satirical, and think to kill the King's enemies with ridicule and *jeux de mots*. But Henri de Guise, who sternly rebukes their ribaldry and abhors their dissolute manners, is not the man to be conquered by such weapons as words. He has placed himself at the head of the Catholic League, negotiates with Spain, and openly aspires to the throne.

For a moment there is peace. Henry, before leaving Paris, by the advice of his mother summoned the Duc de Guise from Nancy to Paris. The Balafré enters the capital in disguise. The cry, "The Duke is with us!" spreads over the city like lightning, and the populace, who adore Guise and detest Henry, tear off his mask and cloak and lead him through the streets in triumph. Catherine, although very ill, is so alarmed at the threatening aspect of affairs, that she causes herself to be carried out to meet him, borne in a chair, and so brings him to the Louvre into the presence of the King. His insolent bearing transports Henry with rage. But the citizens, not to be pacified,

fall out with the King's guards, and there is a fearful uproar in the city. The Louvre is besieged. Henry, haughty and obstinate, is no longer safe in Paris. Maréchal d'Ornano offers to assassinate the Duc de Guise, but the King, by advice of d'Epernon, affects to yield to the policy of his mother, and to accept the supremacy of Guise. Under pretence, however, of a walk in the Tuileries Gardens, then newly planted, he orders his horses to be saddled, and escapes out of Paris, by way of Montmartre, attended only by his favourites. He reaches Chartres in safety. At Chartres he is joined by Catherine, and a treaty is signed—a treaty of false peace, for already d'Epernon and Joyeuse are whispering into the King's ear that "the Duc de Guise must die."

The treaty stipulates that Henry be declared Head of the Catholic League; that all Huguenots be banished—notably the King of Navarre, heir-presumptive to the throne; and that the Duc de Guise be Lieutenant-General of the kingdom. The States-General are to be immediately assembled; and Henri de Guise, once the poetic lover, now hardened into a cold, ambitious bigot—ready to usurp the throne of France to ensure the triumph of the Catholic party, and exclude the King of

Navarre—canvasses France, to insure a majority for the Holy League against those pertinacious enemies of orthodoxy, Condé and Navarre.

The King, meanwhile, overridden and humiliated, agrees to everything, and listens complacently to d'Epernon, who tells him, "He will never be king while Guise lives." So, for the moment, there is peace.

Now the King has left Chartres, and is at Blois. The Balafré and his brother the Cardinal are also there to attend the Parliament, which is summoned, and make known their grievances. So the sunny little town of Blois, sloping sweetly downwards to the Loire, with its superb castle marked by towers, turrets, broad flat roofs, painted windows, and ample courts, is the theatre on which the great battle is to be fought between the rival houses of Guise and Valois. All the chiefs on either side are to be present at a council which is to precede the meeting of the Assembly. Henry—at the instigation of d'Epernon—the better to play his perfidious game has communicated at the same altar with the Balafré and his brother the Cardinal, and given them the kiss of peace to seal their reconciliation.

Catherine's apartments are on the first floor of the château,—a gallery-saloon, the diamonded

windows set in painted arches overlooking the town, the dark walls decorated with a crowned C and a monogram in gold; her oratory, with a large oval window where an altar stands; her writing-closet, with many concealed drawers and *secrets* in the walls—a hidden stair leading to an observatory, and a sleeping-room with a recess for her bed. So unaltered are these rooms that the presence of Catherine still haunts them; she faces one at every step.

In her bed within that recess the great Queen lies dying. She is old and broken, and her mind wanders at times through excess of pain. But she cannot die in peace, for she knows that her son Henry—the last of her race—meditates a hideous crime; a crime in which she would have gloried once, but now, racked with bodily suffering and mental anguish, with remorse for the past and terror for the future, she shudders at the very thought.

She calls him to her. Henry, her beloved Anjou! As he enters her chamber, she struggles upright on her bed. No one would have recognised the majestic Queen in the hideous skeleton that now speaks.

"What are you about to do, my son?" she asks in a tremulous voice; "answer me, Henry. I fear

I know too well what is on your mind. God grant you may succeed, but I fear evil will come of it. The Duke and his brother are too powerful."

"The very reason they should die, my mother. I shall never be King of France while they live."

"But, Henry," gasps Catherine, trembling from weakness and excitement, as she clasps her son's hand, "have you taken measures to assure yourself of the cities? Have you communicated with the Holy Father? Do this, do it at once!"

"Madame, good measures have been taken; trouble not yourself further."

"But, my son," continues Catherine with increasing agitation, "the Cardinal de Guise has been here to visit me; they are full of suspicion. The Cardinal says that I have betrayed them. I replied, 'May I die, my cousin, if I have anything to do with any treason whatever.' My son, I am in great agony," and she groans and turns her eyes glowing with fever full upon him; "do not listen to d'Epernon; let there be peace while I live, and after."

"What!" cries Henry, disengaging himself from her and striding up and down the room. "What! spare, when Guise, triumphant among the citizens of Paris, dared to lay his hand on the hilt

of his sword in our very presence at the Louvre! Spare him who drove me a fugitive from the capital! Spare the chief of the League, who, assisted by Spain, is dismembering France! Spare them, when they will both be within this castle to-night, to attend the council! Spare *them* who never spared ME! No, my mother, I will NOT spare them! Your sickness has weakened your courage. 'A nut for a nut' was once your motto. It is mine. If the Balafré and the Cardinal enter these doors to-morrow they shall not go hence alive; they shall die like rebels as they are."

"Alas! my son," says the Queen in a very low voice,—she has fallen back exhausted upon the bed,—"alas! it is easy to cut the thread of life; but once cut, can you mend it? Shed no more blood, Henry, for my sake, for I am dying. Let my last hour be undisturbed. I have much that troubles me," and she heaves a deep sigh. "Too much blood has flowed already. Spare them, Henry, spare them."

"My mother, *you* never spared an enemy when within your power, nor will I. Either Guise or I must die. You have taught me that all means are good to save the sovereign and support his authority. My brother Charles, by your order,

spared not Coligni and massacred the Huguenots at the festival of St. Bartholomew. *I helped him.* The Guises, madame, must die."

"But, my son," replies Catherine, wringing her bony hands, and struggling again to raise herself upright, "it is sacrilege. You have sworn peace upon the altar; you have eaten together the body of the Lord."

Catherine's voice is so feeble, that the King either does not hear, or does not heed her. He still strides up and down the room, speaking from time to time as if to himself.

"Every detail is arranged; we cannot fail. To-morrow the guards within the walls will be doubled; a hundred Swiss will be posted at the entrance in the courtyard and on the grand staircase. When the Duke arrives, Crillon will see that the outer gates are closed. As soon as Guise enters the council-chamber, I will send for him into my closet. When he passes through the guard-room to reach it, Nambre will bar the door, that he may not return. My trusty Dalahaide and the guards—the 45th—who will be hidden on the secret stair behind the arras, will then descend, fall upon the traitor as he passes through the guard-room, and finish him."

Catherine, with haggard eyes, listens breathlessly. When the King has ceased speaking and looks round for a reply, she has fainted.

* * * * *

The next morning the sky was black with clouds. The month was December. It rained violently, and the wind howled round the corners of the château. Catherine, lying in the uneasy slumber of disease, was awakened at eight o'clock by the sound of heavy footsteps overhead. The state apartments are on the second floor, immediately over and corresponding with those of the Queen-mother. They still remain, gloomy and ill-omened, haunted by evil memories. Every plank has its history—each corner a ghastly detail. There is the hidden stair within the wall, concealed by tapestry, where Dalahaide and the guards hid; the door against which the great Balafré fell, stabbed by Malines in the breast, where he was spurned by the heel of the King, as he himself had spurned Coligni, and where he long lay uncovered, until an old carpet was found in which to wrap his corpse.

* * * * *

Catherine, listening breathlessly, hears the council assembling. Heavy footsteps are pass-

ing backwards and forwards through the guard-room overhead to the royal gallery where the council is to meet. Then all is hushed, and the face of the dying queen flushes with hope, and her hands clasp themselves in prayer, if, perchance, at the last moment Henry has relented and listened to her entreaties to spare the Duke.

A moment after a door closes violently. She hears a single footstep—a powerful and firm footstep. It crosses the floor. Then come loud tramplings, as of a rush of armed men, a clash of weapons, a fall as of a heavy body; then a terrible cry—

"A moi, mes amis!—trahison!—à moi, Guise,—je me meurs."

The dying woman knows that all is over; she sinks back on her bed raving in delirium. In a few days she was dead.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE LAST OF THE VALOIS.

We are at Saint-Cloud. The time, the wars of the League. At the head of the Leaguers is the Duc de Mayenne, only living brother of the Guises. Henry III. commands the royal forces, and with him is Henry of Navarre. Since the Queen-mother's death the King of France has become reconciled to his brother-in-law and shows himself almost a hero. They are both defending the Crown to which Mayenne aspires. Eight months have passed since the murder of the Balafré. That treacherous deed has done the King no good; Mayenne lives to revenge his brother's death, and the Catholic party is still more alienated from the King since he has called a heretic into his councils. The royal troops are lying encamped among the hilly woodlands of the park towards Ville d'Avray and Meudon, then, as now, pleasant to the eye.

On the 1st August, 1589, Henry sat in the long

gallery of the palace (until lately lined with pictures and gorgeously decorated), playing at cards with his attendants. He holds himself so upright, that he moves neither his head nor his feet, and his hands as little as possible. A hood hangs upon his shoulders; a little cap, with a flower stuck in it, is placed over one ear; round his neck, suspended by a broad blue ribbon, is a basket of gold wicker-work, full of little puppies.

Monsieur d'O, Seigneur of Fiesnes and Maillebois, first gentleman of the bed-chamber, and Governor of Paris, has been joking him about the predictions of an astrologer, named Osman, who has arrived that evening at Saint-Cloud in company with some noblemen.

"By our Ladye-mother! let us have him in and hear what he can say," cries the King. "These fellows are diverting. I will question him myself."

Osman is sent for; but startled at so sudden and unexpected an interview with the King himself in such a whimsical attire, scarcely knows how to reply to the gibes his Majesty addressed to him.

"Come, come," says the King, "let us hear what you can do. They tell me you draw horoscopes. Let me have a specimen of your skill."

"Sire," replies Osman, somewhat recovered from his confusion, "I will obey you; but, as sure as fate, the heavens this night are unpropitious. The light of the moon is veiled; there are signs of mourning among the stars; lamentations and woe are written in the planets; a great misfortune hangs over us—Beware!"

"By St. Denis!" cries the King, "the fellow is glib enough with his tongue; but tell me, good heathen, are the stars in mourning for a king or for an emperor?"

"Sire, they mourn over the approaching extinction of your race."

"Heaven preserve us!" answers the King, with affected consternation, caressing his puppies. "But tell me now, if you have any knowledge, what do the celestial powers think of our accursed rebels, the Leaguers, and their chief, the Duc de Mayenne? Is that bold traitor in favour among the stars?"

Osman does not at once reply; but, advancing to the window, throws open the sash, and silently observes the heavens.

"Sire, I see one star shining brightly in the firmament."

"Where?" asks the King.

"Just over the Camp of Meudon, where Henry

of Navarre lies this night. But look, your Majesty, at that other star there over the woods. It blazes for a moment; and now, see—it falls; it has disappeared behind the palace!"

"By the mother of God," says the King, reddening either with terror or passion, "I have had enough of this gibberish. Hark ye, you wandering Jew! no more of these ugly portents, or, by St. Louis, the guardian of our race, we will hold you warrant for all that may happen to our person."

Osman shrunk back from the window, trembling with fright. He does not wait for permission to depart, but as the King rises to address some gentlemen he glides from the gallery.

"If ever I heard a voice hoarse with blood, it is his," mutters the astrologer, pointing to the King as he crept away. "By the brightness of the celestial bodies, there will be evil this night. I will never draw horoscope more, if to-morrow's sun finds Henry of Valois alive. There is blood on him, but he sees it not. His star has fallen, he beheld it; but he understood not the portent."

As Osman crosses the circular hall opening from the gallery and leading to the principal staircase, he meets the Comte d'Auvergne[1] conversing

[1] See Note 18.

with a Dominican monk, whose sinister countenance expressed every evil passion. A crowd of attendants had assembled and are listening to the conversation.

"Good father," says M. d'Auvergne, addressing the Dominican, "you must not, at this late hour, insist on seeing his Majesty; he is engaged."

"But, indeed, monseigneur, I do insist upon seeing him without a moment's delay, and alone. It is a matter of life and death." The monk's bold words and determined bearing evidently impress M. d'Auvergne in his favour.

"Are you the bearer of any dispatches for his Majesty?" he asks. "Those might be delivered, although his Majesty has just retired and is at this moment in his oratory, busy with his devotions."

As he spoke, d'Auvergne scans him curiously; the monk perceives the look, draws his cowl closer over his face, and withdraws from the full glare of the lights on the staircase.

"I am the bearer of letters of the greatest importance, monseigneur—letters from the President Harlay, now a prisoner of the League; but I am charged to deliver them in person, and into the hand of his Majesty alone. Nor is that all; I have

a secret communication to make, which it behoves the King to hear without delay. Good gentlemen," and he faces round to the courtiers who are gathered about him "I pray you, one of you, go to the King and tell him what I say."

"Impossible," replies the Count d'O, who came from the gallery at that moment, and hears the last few words; "impossible. His Majesty is now alone; I have just left him. He is fatigued, and desired not to be disturbed."

"Good God!" cries the monk, clasping his hands, "if I do not see him to-night, I shall never see him."

"And why not, I pray?" asks the Comte d'Auvergne. "Come and sup with my people to-night; and to-morrow, as early as you please, I will take you to his Majesty. Follow me."

"I wash my hands of all the evil this delay will cause," exclaims the monk, following him reluctantly. "On your head be it, monseigneur." They quitted the hall together.

All this time Osman had stood near watching them. He had not lost a syllable of the conversation. "Did I not say there was blood?" he mutters half aloud; "is it not true? The knowledge of it came to me in a vision. Now I have read it

also in the stars. The blood of the King is on that monk. His robes are spotted with it. In his hand, while he spoke, there was a dagger. None else beheld it; but I saw it, and the point streamed with the King's life-blood. Woe! woe! woe! Would that I could speak! Would that they would listen! Before many hours, death will be within these walls. Alas! it is given to me to avert it if they would but hear me."

The astrologer slowly follows the steps of the Comte d'Auvergne and the Dominican, descending the stairs after them. They enter a suite of rooms on the ground floor of the palace. The monk had now thrown back his cowl and displayed a face yet young, but seamed and wrinkled with deep lines. His eyes are dull and bloodshot; his thin hair scarcely shades his projecting forehead. He stands in the centre of the apartment, silent, sullen, and pre-occupied.

"What is your name?" asks the Count sternly, turning towards him.

"Jacques Clément," is the short rejoinder.

"You say you are the bearer of letters to the King?"

"Yes," replies he, "from Monsieur de Brienne and the President Harlay, now both prisoners in

the Bastille. There is my passport; you see it is signed by Monsieur de Brienne."

"Show me the President's letter," says d'Auvergne; "his writing is as familiar to me as my own. If you are a spy, you will meet with no mercy here," and he measured him from head to foot with eyes full of doubt and suspicion.

The monk draws forth a parcel of unsealed letters, which the Count reads and examines.

"It is well," he says. "These are proofs that you are a messenger from the King's friends. But how did you, carrying such dangerous credentials, contrive to pass the gates of Paris? Answer me that, my father."

"My habit protected me," replies the monk, devoutly crossing himself, "our Blessed Lady gave me courage and address to escape from those Philistines. Once past the gates, I came here in company with Monsieur de la Guesle's people."

"You say, then, that you will answer with your head that two gates of Paris will open to the King if he advances?"

"I swear before God that this is the truth," replies the monk, again crossing himself; "and my God is not that false one worshipped by the Huguenot dogs under Henry of Navarre, but the

true God of the Holy Catholic Church. Let the King trust to his loyal Catholic subjects, and beware of the heretics that are in his council and amongst his troops." And the monk scowls around. His eyes meet those of Osman the astrologer, which are fixed on him with the intensity of a cat ready to spring. Jacques Clément trembles. For an instant his courage forsakes him and he turns pale.

"Well, father," says d'Auvergne, laughing, "you are true to your trade—a steady Catholic. We understand; you can smell a heretic a mile off, I'll be sworn."

The monk makes no reply, and to avoid further discussion turns to a table on which supper is spread, and sitting down, begins to eat.

The Attorney-General de la Guesle having been told of the arrival of a mysterious monk, enters the room and confirms what he had said of their meeting outside the gates of Paris.

The Comte d'Auvergne, after scrutinising Jacques Clément for some minutes, turns aside to Monsieur de la Guesle, and whispers—

"I do not know why, but I have a strange suspicion of that fellow. All he says seems fair enough and his papers are properly signed; but

there is something about his dark, sinister face and surly answers that alarms me."

Osman, seeing them converse apart, advances eagerly from the bottom of the room, and addresses them in a low voice, "If monseigneur will only listen to me, he will not admit this monk within a hundred miles of his Majesty. The stars, Count, are——"

"Confound the stars!" interrupts Monsieur de la Guesle. "Do you take us for a parcel of fools? Go prate elsewhere."

The noblemen seat themselves at the upper end of the supper-table. The Comte d'Auvergne, Monsieur de la Guesle, and other gentlemen are served by an old valet who, after pouring out the wine all round, stands behind the chair of his master, the Count. His eyes are fixed on Jacques Clément, who had drawn forth from the folds of his sleeve a large dagger with which he cuts up his meat.

"May it please, monseigneur," the valet whispers into the Count's ear, "the reverend father knows how to travel in these stormy times. He has not forgotten to bring a goodly dagger with him; though perhaps the breviary, being less useful, is forgotten."

"Not so, brother," answers the monk who, over-

hearing his whisper, draws out a missal from his bosom; "I never travel without the one and the other—defences for the body and the soul—whichever may most need it."

But the garrulous old servant, once set talking, is not to be silenced. He begins a long account, in a low voice, addressed to the Count, of how the monk, on arriving, had entertained him and his fellows in the courtyard with a history of the death of Holofernes the tyrant, by the hands of a Jewish maiden Judith, the saviour of her country.

"A bloody tale, forsooth," says M. de la Guesle, eyeing the monk.

"Ay, blood, blood!" mutters Osman, who is seated below the salt, next the Comte d'Auvergne. "See you not, my lord," he continues, half aloud to the Count, holding up his hand warningly, "that this monk is a mad fanatic? Admit him to no speech with the King, I entreat you; he is mad, monseigneur."

"Oh," answers the Count, in a low voice, "I will watch over his Majesty. As the bearer of letters of importance I cannot refuse him an audience, but I will answer that no mischief comes of the meeting."

Soon after, supper being ended, the party separates. The monk is conducted to a bed; and Osman, heaving many heavy sighs, retires to the room appropriated to him, where he consults the stars, until the dawn of day obliterates them and ends his labour.

The next day is the 2nd of August, and the King, who has been informed of the arrival of a monk with letters over night, commands his early attendance in his bed-chamber. The Comte d'Auvergne conducts Jacques Clément into the presence of Henry, who sits in an arm-chair, only partially dressed, close to the bed. As the communication is to be private, the King signs to d'Auvergne, Clermont, and the other attendants present, to retire to the farther end of the room; then he stretches out his hand to receive the packet from Jacques Clément, who in presenting it bows his head, and stands motionless, his arms crossed on his breast.

As Henry's attention is absorbed and his eyes are bent upon the page, Jacques Clément suddenly draws out the dagger he carried concealed in his sleeve, springs forward, and plunges it up to the hilt in the King's abdomen.

"Help!" groans the King, with difficulty

plucking out the weapon and flinging it on the floor. "Help! the wretch has stabbed me. I am killed—kill him!"

D'Auvergne rushes forward. The pages and gentlemen in attendance, the guards outside, and Monsieur de la Guesle, who is waiting for an audience, all burst into the room.

The King is lying back in the arm-chair; a pool of blood stains the floor from a deep wound; Jacques Clément still stands immovable before him. Swords flash in the air; some fly to support the dying monarch, some to raise an alarm over the palace; others, transported with fury, fall upon the monk, who offers no resistance. He is speedily dispatched. Osman, hearing the uproar, enters. "What!" cries he, "is the King dead?"

"Not quite," is the reply.

"Who did it?"

"Jacques Clément."

"Sainte Marie!" groans the astrologer, wringing his hands, "why did you not listen to me? This would never have happened. Did I not say there was blood on that monk? Did I not say that the star of the House of Valois had fallen? Alas! alas! If you had but heeded my words!"

At this moment M. d'O and the Comte d'Auvergne leave the King's room to send for a surgeon.

"Why did you kill the assassin? We might have tortured him, and discovered his accomplices," says M. d'O, while they await the messenger whom they had dispatched.

"I did not kill him," answered the Comte d'Auvergne. "The King was seated when he entered, and, taking the wretch's papers in his hands, was busy reading them. M. Clermont and I were present, but had retired a little to leave his Majesty more at liberty. As he rose from his seat and was addressing the monk, the traitor drew a dagger from his sleeve and plunged it into the King's stomach. The King cried out, 'Kill him—he has killed me!' and, drawing forth the dagger from the wound, gave two or three cuts at the assassin, and then fell. We rushed to his aid, and smote the fellow, who was unarmed, right and left. At the noise, the doors burst open, and the gentlemen and pages in their rage finished him with a hundred blows. Seeing that he was dead, I ordered him to be stripped and thrown out of the window, in order to be recognised if possible."

"What does it matter who recognises him?"

answers M. d'O. "Have the papers that he showed the King disappeared also?"

Before the Count could reply the surgeon appears. He desires that every one shall be turned out of the King's bedroom whilst he examines him. He pronounces the wound mortal; the dagger was poisoned. Henry, after great anguish, expires in a few hours. The letters were forgeries. The body of Jacques Clément, having first been drawn by four horses through the streets of Saint-Cloud, is burned by the common hangman. He is much lauded, however, at Rome, where Urban VII. reigns as Pontiff; at Paris his effigy is placed upon the altars beside the Host.

Meanwhile the King of Navarre is within his quarters at Meudon. His minister Sully lodges a little way down the hill, in the house of a man called Sauvat. Sully is just sitting down to supper, when his secretary enters and desires him to go instantly to his master.

Henry of Navarre tells him that an express has arrived from Saint-Cloud, and that the King is already dead, or dying. "Sully," he says, "for what I know, I may be at this very instant King of France. Yet, who will support me? Half my army will desert if Henry be really dead. Not a

prince of the blood—not a minister will stand by me. I am here as it were in the midst of an enemy's country, with but a handful of followers. What is to be done?"

"Stay where you are, Sire, is my advice," answers Sully. "If you are indeed now King of France, remain with such as are faithful to you. A monarch should never fly. But let us go to Saint-Cloud and hear the truth."

"That is just what I desire," answers Henry. "We will start as soon as our horses are saddled."

As they enter the gates of Saint-Cloud, a man rushes by them, shouting "The King is dead—the King is dead!" Henry reins up his horse. The Swiss Guard, posted round the château, perceive him. They throw down their arms and cast themselves at his feet. "Sire," they cry, "now you are our King and master, do not forsake us." Biron, the Duc de Bellegarde, the Comtes d'O, M. de Châteauvieux, and De Dampierre come up; they all warmly salute Henry as their sovereign.

But the bonfires that already blaze in the streets of Paris at the news of the death of the King, warn Henry of Navarre that he must fight as many battles to gain the Crown as he has already done to secure his personal liberty.

CHAPTER XXIII.

DON JUAN.

THE wars of the League rage fiercer than ever. By the death of the last Valois, Henry III., Henry IV., a Bourbon, is King of France.[1] But he is only acknowledged by his Protestant subjects. To the Catholics he is but a rebel, and still only King of Navarre. The Duc de Mayenne (a Guise, brother of the Balafré), subsidised with money and troops by Spain, is the orthodox pretender to the throne. The capital, Paris, is with him. The two Henries, reconciled after the death of Catherine de Medici, encamped with their respective forces at Saint-Cloud, were about to invest the city. But now Henry III. is dead. His successor, Henry of Navarre, weakened in influence, troops, and money, is forced to raise the siege and retire. Henry IV. had at this time but 3,000 troops, while the army of Mayenne numbered 32,000 men. Then came

[1] See Note 19.

help from England. The victory of Ivry was gained, Henry again invested Paris and encamped on the heights of Montmartre. It was now he uttered that characteristic *mot*:—"I am like the true mother in the judgment of Solomon,—I would rather not have Paris at all than see it torn to pieces."

At this time the fortune of war called the King in many places. He loved an adventurous life. Brave to a fault, he rode hither and thither like a knight-errant, regardless of his personal safety, accompanied only by a few attendants.

Although a warrior and a statesman, Henry was a true child of the mountains. Born under the shadow of the Pyrenees, he would as soon encamp under a hedge as lie on a bed of down; would rather eat dried ham spiced with garlic than dine sumptuously at Jarnet's Palace, at the Marais, or at "Le Petit More," the polite *traiteur* of that day; would quaff the *petit cru* of his native grape with more relish than the costliest wines from the vineyards of Champagne or Bordeaux. Henry was not born upon the banks of the Garonne, but a more thorough Gascon never lived,—his hand upon his sword, his foot in the stirrup, his gun slung across his shoulder, the first in assault, the

last in retreat, ready to slay the wild boar of his native forests, or lute in hand to twang a roundelay in honour of the first Dulcinea he encountered. Boastful, fearless, capricious; his versatility of accomplishments suited the changing aspects of the times. He was plain of speech, rough in manner—with a quaint jest alike for friend or foe; irregular in his habits, eating at no stated times, but when hungry voraciously devouring everything that pleased him, especially fruit and oysters; negligent, not to say dirty, in his person, and smelling strong of garlic. A man who called a spade a spade, swore like a trooper, and hated the parade of courts; was constant in friendship, fickle in love, promised anything freely, especially marriage, to any beauty who caught his eye; a boon companion among men, a libertine with women, a story teller, cynical in his careless epicureanism, and so profound a believer in "the way of fate," that reckless of the morrow he extracted all things from the passing hour.

He is now thirty-three years old, of middle height, broad-shouldered, and coarsely made. His swarthy skin is darkened by constant exposure; he looks battered, wrinkled, and dissipated. His long nose overhangs his grizzly moustache, and

a mocking expression lurks in the corners of his mouth. The fire of his eyes is unquenched, and the habit of command is stamped on every motion.

He is with his army at Mantes. It is evening; he is surrounded by a few friends, and from talk of war the conversation turns to women. The Duc de Bellegarde, captain of light horse, the close friend and constant companion of the King, sits beside him. He has a noble presence, is supple, graceful, gentle in speech and generous in nature.

Bellegarde speaks boastingly of the beauty of a certain lady whom he is engaged to marry, Gabrielle d'Estrées, daughter of the Marquis d'Estrées.

"*Cap de Dieu!*" exclaims Henry, after listening to Bellegarde in silence; "I have heard of the lady, one of the daughters of our brave general of artillery, Antoine d'Estrées; but I will back my bewitching Abbess of Montmartre, Marie de Beauvilliers, against your Gabrielle."

"Not if your Majesty saw her, believe me," replies Bellegarde warmly.

"You are a boaster, Bellegarde. You dare not produce your paragon."

"On the contrary, Sire, I only desire that

Mademoiselle d'Estrées should be seen, for then alone she can be appreciated."

"Say you so, Bellegarde? That is fair; will you bet a thousand crowns on Gabrielle against Marie?"

"I accept, Sire; but how can we decide?"

"You see the lady. It is easily managed. Do you visit her often?"

"Your Majesty seemingly forgets I am engaged to marry her."

"I understand. Now, Bellegarde, I forbid you, as your sovereign and master, to see this fair lady, except in my company. *Par Dieu!* I will refuse you leave of absence."

Bellegarde's heart misgave him. The King's vehemence alarms him. He saw too late the mistake that he has made.

"Now, Bellegarde, don't look like a doctor of the Sorbonne in a fix; Mademoiselle d'Estrées will not object if I go in your company?"

"Your Majesty must consider that I have no excuse for introducing you," replies he, with some hesitation. "Besides, consider, Sire, the roads are unsafe and skirmishers are abroad."

"Tut! tut! man; when did I ever care for that when a fair lady was in the way? I insist upon going, or you shall not either. Both or none.

Listen how it shall be managed. I will disguise myself as—well, let me see—a Spaniard; no one will suspect me in that character. You shall introduce me as an Hidalgo, Don Juan, we will say;" and a wicked leer lights up his countenance. "Don Juan, your prisoner,—taken in a *mêlée*, now on parole; and my poor Chicot[1] shall go with us, too, for company."

Gabrielle was then living at the paternal Castle of Cœuvres, which stood on a wooded height between Soissons and Laon, with her father and her sisters. She was passionately attached to the seductive Bellegarde, and anticipated their speedy union with all imaginable happiness.

One evening, while she was indulging in those agreeable musings proper to the state called "being in love," Bellegarde was abruptly announced. He was accompanied by two gentlemen: one, short in stature, with a comical expression of countenance, was introduced as Monsieur Chicot; the other, by name "Don Juan," neither tall nor short, but with very broad shoulders, had greyish hair, highly coloured cheeks, a swarthy skin, and was remarkable for a prominent nose and exceedingly audacious eyes.

[1] See Note 20.

Gabrielle rose in haste and was about to fling her arms round Bellegarde, but, on seeing his two companions, she drew back, welcoming them all with a more formal courtesy.

Gabrielle was eighteen, tall, slim, and singularly graceful. The severity of her aquiline features was relieved by the bluest eyes and a most delicate pink and white complexion; webs of auburn hair flowed over her shoulders. She cast a curious glance at her lover's singular companions; she was surprised and vexed that Bellegarde had not come alone, and to find him cold and reserved. However, any shortcomings on his part were amply made up by the cordial accolade of the Spanish Don, who extolled her beauty to her face, and, without asking permission, kissed her on the cheek.

Gabrielle's delicacy was hurt at this freedom; she reproached herself for the frankness with which she had received strangers, believing them to be friends of her lover. Casting a helpless glance at him, she looked down, blushed and retreated to a distant part of the room, where she seated herself.

"Pray, madame, excuse our friend," said Chicot, seeing the confusion of Gabrielle at such unexpected familiarity; "he is a Spaniard, only newly arrived in France; he is quite unacquainted with the usages of the country."

"By the mass!" cried Bellegarde, evidently ill at ease, and placing himself in front of his love, "Spaniard, indeed! I, for my part, know no country in the world where gentlemen are permitted, thus uninvited, to salute the ladies—at least, in civilised latitudes. It is well Mademoiselle's father was not present."

His annoyance was, however, quite lost on the Don, who, his eyes fixed in bold admiration on Gabrielle, did not heed it.

"Bellegarde," said Gabrielle, blushing to her forehead, seeing his deeply offended look, "excuse this stranger, I entreat, for my sake; I am sure he meant no offence. Let not the joy I feel at seeing you be overcast by this little occurrence." And she rose, advanced to where he stood, looked fondly at him, and took his hand in both of hers.

This appeal was enough. Bellegarde, though anxious, was no longer angry, and, upon Gabrielle's invitation, the party seated themselves, Gabrielle placing herself beside Bellegarde.

"This gentleman, madame," said Chicot, turning towards Gabrielle, "whose admiration of you has led him to offend, is our prisoner; he surrendered to us yesterday in the *mêlée* at Marly, and, his ransom

paid, to-morrow morning he will start to join the army of the Duke of Parma. Though somewhat hot-headed and wilful he is an excellent soldier; he knows how to behave in the battle-field, if his manners are otherwise too free;" and Chicot turned round his head and winked at Don Juan, who laughed.

"At least, gentlemen, now you are here," said Gabrielle, "by whatever chance—and the chance must be good that brings you to me" (and her blue eyes turned towards Bellegarde)—"you will partake of some refreshment. I beg you to do so in the name of Monsieur de Bellegarde, my affianced husband, my father being absent."

"Fair lady," said the Spaniard, breaking silence for the first time, and speaking in excellent French, "I never before rejoiced so much in being able to understand the French tongue as spoken by your dulcet voice; this is the happiest moment of my life, for it has introduced me to the fairest of your sex. I repeat it deliberately—the fairest of your sex;" and he looked significantly at Bellegarde. "I accept your invitation, readily. Were I fortunate enough to be your prisoner instead of the Captain's, my ransom would never be paid, I warrant."

"*Cap de Dieu!*" exclaimed Chicot, grinning from ear to ear, "the Spanish Dons well merit their reputation for gallantry, but our friend here, Don Juan, outdoes them all, and, indeed, every one of his nation."

"Madame," broke in the Spaniard, very red in the face and speaking with great vehemence, not appearing to hear this remark, and still addressing Gabrielle, on whom his eyes were riveted, "I declare if any one, be he noble or villein, knight or king, dare to say that any woman under God's sun surpasses you in beauty or grace, I declare him to be false and disloyal, and with fitting opportunity I will prove, in more than words, that he lies to the teeth."

"Come, come, my good friend," interrupted Bellegarde, much discomposed, "do not, I beseech you, go into these heroics; you will alarm this lady. If you heat yourself in this way, the night air will give you cold. Besides, remember, Señor, this lady, Mademoiselle d'Estrées, is my affianced bride, and that certain conditions were made between us before I introduced you, which conditions you swore to observe;" and Bellegarde looked reproachfully at him.

Don Juan felt the implied reproof, and, for the

first time since he had entered, moved his eyes to some other object than the smiling face of Gabrielle.

Her sisters now joined them. Although they much resembled her, and would have been comely in any other company, Gabrielle so far exceeded them as to throw them altogether into the shade. They were both immediately saluted with nearly equal warmth by the Spanish Don, who evidently would not reform his manners in this particular. Like Gabrielle, they were quite abashed and retreated to the farther side of the room.

"Let me tell you, ladies," said Chicot, advancing towards them, "if you were to see our friend, Don Juan, in a justaucorps of satin and glittering with gold and precious stones, with a white panache in his velvet cap, you would not think he looked so much amiss. But are you going to give us nothing to eat? What has the Don done that he is to be starved? Though he be a Spaniard, and serves against Henry of Navarre, he is a Christian, and has a stomach like any other."

On this hint the whole party adjourned to the eating-room. Gabrielle carefully avoided the Don and kept close to Bellegarde, who looked the picture of misery. Her sisters clung to her, Chicot was bursting with ill-suppressed laughter, and the Don

was fully occupied in endeavouring to place himself beside Gabrielle, on whom his eyes were again intently fixed. At table, spite of Bellegarde's manœuvres, he contrived to place himself beside her. He eat and drank voraciously; perpetually proposed toasts in Gabrielle's honour, and confused her to such a degree, that she heartily repented having invited him to remain, particularly as the annoyance of Bellegarde did not escape her. In this state of general misunderstanding, the merry Chicot again came to the rescue.

"Let us drink to the health of the King of France and Navarre!" cried he. "Come, Don Juan, forget your politics and join us: here's prosperity and success to our gallant Henry—long may he live!"

"This is a toast we must drink standing and in chorus," said Bellegarde, rising.

The Spaniard smiled.

"But why," observed Gabrielle, "does Don Juan bear arms against the King of France if he is his partisan?"

"Fair lady, your remark is just," replied the Don, "but the fortune of war drives a soldier into many accidents; however, I only wish all France was as much the King's friend as I am."

Chicot now took up a lute which lay near, tried the strings, and in a somewhat cracked voice sang the following song, wagging his head and winking at the Spaniard as he did so:—

"Vive Henri Quatre,
Vive ce roi vaillant;
Ce diable à quatre,
A le triple talent
De boire et de battre
Et d'être vert galant."

"Long live the King! Vive Henri Quatre!" was drunk, with all the honours, in a chorus of applause. The Spaniard wiped a tear from his eye, and sat down without speaking.

"*Cap de Dieu!*" cried Chicot, "the right cause will triumph at last."

"Yes," replied Bellegarde, "sooner or later we shall see our brave King enter Paris and his noble palace of the Louvre in state; but meanwhile he must not fool away his time in follies and amours while the League is in strength."

"There you speak truth," said Chicot; "he is too much given to such games; he's a very Sardanapalus: and," continued he, squinting at the Don with a most comical expression, "if report speak true, at this very moment his Majesty is off on some adventure touching the rival beauty of certain

ladies, to the manifest neglect of his Crown and the ruin of his affairs."

"Ah!" exclaimed Gabrielle, her eyes sparkling with enthusiasm, "if some second Agnes Sorel would but appear, and, making like her a noble use of the King's love and her influence, incite him to conquer himself, to forsake all follies, and to devote his great talents in fighting heart and soul against the rebels and the League!"

"Alas!" sighed Don Juan, "those were the early ages; such love as that is not to be found now—it is a dream, a fantasy. Henry will find no Agnes Sorel in these later days."

"Say not so, noble Don," replied Gabrielle; "I for my part adore the King—I long to know him."

The Spaniard's eyes flashed, and Bellegarde started visibly.

"Love," continued Gabrielle, flushing with excitement, "love is of all times and of all seasons. True love is immortal. But I allow that it is rare, though not impossible, to excite such a passion."

"If it is a science to be learnt, will you teach me, fair lady?" asked the Spaniard tenderly.

At this turn in the conversation Bellegarde again became painfuly agitated, and the subject dropped. The Don now addressed his conversation to the

sisters of Gabrielle, and at their request took up the lute and sang an improvised song with considerable taste, in a fine manly voice, which gained for him loud applauses all round. The words were these:

"Charmante Gabrielle,
Percé de mille dards,
Quand la gloire m'appelle
A la suite de Mars,
Cruelle départie.
Que ne suis-je sans vie
Ou sans amour?"

Gabrielle looked, perhaps, a trifle too much pleased at the somewhat free admiration expressed in these verses, and spite of Bellegarde, approached the Don to thank him after he had finished.

"Lady, did my song please you?" said he softly, trying to kiss her hand. "If it had any merit you inspired me."

"Yes," replied she musingly. "You wished just now you were my prisoner. Had you been, I should long ago have freed you if you had sung to me like that, I am sure."

"And why?" asked he.

"Because you have something in your voice I should have feared to hear too often," said she in a low voice, lest Bellegarde should hear her.

"Then in that case I would always have remained your voluntary captive, *ma belle*."

How long this conversation might have continued authorities do not state; but Bellegarde, now really displeased, approached the whispering pair, giving an indignant glance at Gabrielle and a look full of reproach at the Don.

"Come, come, Don Juan!" said he. "It is time to go. Where are our horses? The day wears on, we shall scarce reach the camp ere sundown."

"*Ventre Saint Gris!*" said the Spaniard, starting up, "there is surely no need for such haste."

"Your promise," muttered Bellegarde in his ear.

"Confound you, Bellegarde! You have introduced me into paradise, and now you drag me away just when the breath of heaven is warming me." Don Juan looked broken-hearted at being obliged to leave, and cast the most loving glances towards Gabrielle and her handsome sisters.

"I opine we ought never to have come at all," said Chicot, winking violently and looking at Gabrielle, who with downcast eyes evidently regretted the necessity of the Don's departure.

"*Mère de Dieu!*" muttered the latter to Bellegarde, "you are too hard thus to bind me to my cursed promise."

"Gabrielle," said Bellegarde, drawing her aside, and speaking in a low voice, "one kiss ere I go.

You are my beloved—my other self, the soul of my soul. Adieu! This has been a miserable meeting. You have grieved me, love; but perhaps it is my own fault. I ought to have come alone. That Spaniard is disgusting"—Gabrielle turned her head away—"But I will soon return. In the meantime, a caution in your ear. If this same Don Juan comes again during my absence to pay you a second visit, send him off I charge you, by the love I know you bear me. Give him his *congé* without ceremony; hold no parley, I entreat you; he is a sad good-for-nothing, and would come with no good intentions. I could tell you more. He is——but next time you shall hear all. Till then, adieu!"

"I will obey you, Bellegarde," replied Gabrielle somewhat coldly; "but the Spaniard seems to me an honest gentleman, and looks born to command."

The whole party then proceeded to the court-yard, where the three horses were waiting.

"Adieu, most adorable Gabrielle!" cried the Spaniard, vaulting first into the saddle. "Would to heaven I had never set eyes on you, or that, having seen you, I might gaze to eternity on that heavenly face."

"Well," said Bellegarde gaily, for his spirits rose as he saw the Spaniard ready to depart, "you need only wait until peace be made, and then I will present you at Court, Don Juan, where Madame la Duchesse de Bellegarde, otherwise La Belle Gabrielle, will shine fairest of the fair."

"You are not married yet, Duke, however," rejoined the Spaniard, looking back; "and remember, you must first have his Majesty's leave and license—not always to be got. Ha, ha, my friend, I have you there!" laughed the Don. "Adieu, then, once more, most beautiful ladies, adieu to you all! Bellegarde, *you have gained your bet.*"

CHAPTER XXIV.

CHARMANTE GABRIELLE.

After this meeting Don Juan soon contrived to return, and the lady, forgetful of her lover's advice, received him. This was sufficient encouragement for so audacious a cavalier, and an intimacy sprang up between them ending in a confession of his being the King. Gabrielle was charmed, for she had always been his devoted partisan. What at first appeared bold and free in his manner she now ascribed to a proper sense of his own rank, born as he was to command and to be obeyed. Their romantic introduction and the disguise he had condescended to assume on that occasion captivated her imagination almost as much as his unbounded admiration of her person flattered her vanity. Henry, too, was a fit subject for devoted loyalty at that time, closely beset as he was by the troops of the League, unable to

enter Paris, and only maintaining his ground by prodigies of valour and the most intrepid perseverance.

Should she, then, be unkind, and repulse him, when he vowed to her, on his knees, that his only happy moments were spent in her society? The image of Bellegarde grew fainter and fainter; their meetings became colder and more unsatisfactory. He reproached her for her unbecoming encouragement of a libertine monarch; Gabrielle defended herself by declaring that her heart was her own, and that she might bestow it where she thought proper. As yet, however, there had been no formal rupture between them. Bellegarde loved the fascinating girl too fondly to renounce her lightly; and she herself, as yet undecided, hesitated before resigning a man whose attachment was honourable and legitimate, and whose birth and position were brilliant, to receive the dubious addresses of a married monarch. True, the shameful excesses of Marguerite de Valois, his Queen, excused and almost exonerated the King; Henry urged this circumstance with passionate eloquence, promising Gabrielle, spite of state reasons, to marry her as soon as, settled on the throne, he had leisure legally to prove the scandalous conduct of his wife and to

obtain a papal divorce. This, to a vain and beautiful woman like Gabrielle, was a telling argument.

Still, Gabrielle had not broken with Bellegarde; she delighted to irritate the passion of the King by yet professing some love for her old admirer. At times she refused to see Henry at all, and actually went on a visit to her aunt, Madame de Sourdis, without even bidding him adieu. This coquetry made the King desperate. He was so overcome at her sudden departure, that he was ready, according to his habit, to promise anything she asked. The difficulty was how to reach her, for he must start from Mantes, at the gravest risk, passing through two outposts and seven leagues of open country occupied by the League. But now he was wrought up to such a pass that he was ready to sacrifice his Crown or his head to win her. As soon, therefore, as he ascertained that Gabrielle had returned to Cœuvres he swore a solemn oath to see her or die. The country was covered with troops; alone he dared not venture; with attendants he compromised his beloved. Such obstacles were maddening. At last he decided to set forth on horseback, accompanied only by a few devoted followers. With this escort he rode four leagues through the most dangerous part of the route, then left them

at a certain spot to await his return. Towards Cœuvres he wandered on until he found a roadside house. There he offered a peasant some gold pieces to lend him a suit of clothes, in order, as he told the man, the more safely to deliver some letters of importance to the Seigneur of Cœuvres. The peasant readily consented to his proposal. In those boisterous days of internecine warfare nothing of this kind aroused astonishment, spies, in every species of disguise, continually passing to and fro between the two armies. So Henry IV., in the garb of a peasant, pushed on alone.

The day was fast falling, deep shadows gathered in the forest and around the castle. Gabrielle sat within in the twilight embroidering a scarf. She was thinking over all the difficulties of her position, divided as she was between regard for the generous Bellegarde and her passion each day growing stronger for the King. Suddenly her maid Louise came into the room and begged her, as she had passed all day in the house, to take a little fresh air.

"Come, madame, while there is yet a little light; come, at least, to the balcony that looks out over the terrace, where the breeze is so pleasant, and see the sun set over the tree-tops."

"No, no," replied Gabrielle, shaking her head sadly. "Leave me alone. I have enough to think about, and I want to finish my scarf, or it will not be done by the time I promised Bellegarde. Besides, I do not fancy open balconies in the month of November; it is too cold."

"Oh! but," pleaded Louise, "the day has been so splendid—like summer in the forest. Pray come, madame."

"Why do you plague me so? I never remember this great desire for open air before." And Gabrielle rose. She was no sooner on the balcony, watching the last streaks of golden light glittering among the branches and lighting up the plain beyond in a ruddy mist, than all at once she heard a rustling noise, and on looking down saw, just under the balcony, on the grass-plot, a peasant on a horse, laden with a bundle of straw.

The peasant stopped and stared at her for some time, then, throwing away the straw, he flung himself from his horse and fell on his knees before her, clasping his hands, as if about to worship at some shrine.

Juliette, Gabrielle's sister, now joined her on the balcony. Readier-witted than she, Juliette whispered—

"Gabrielle, it is the King—he is disguised."

Louise burst into a loud laugh at their surprise, and ran away. It was now apparent why she had been so anxious to make Gabrielle go on the balcony before to see the sun set. Gabrielle had not dreamt of seeing the King, who was reported to be encamped at some distance. Her first feeling was one of anger at his utter want of dignity. To kneel on the wet grass, and in the dress of a peasant! Besides, this disguise was most unbecoming to him. He looked positively hideous.

Juliette retired, and Gabrielle was left standing alone on the balcony before the King. As yet she had not spoken.

"What! not a word to greet me?" cried Henry, rising. "Why, *vrai Dieu*, many a lady of our Court would have flung herself down headlong to welcome me, and never cared if she broke her neck! Come, *belle des belles*, look down graciously upon your devoted slave, whose only desire is to die at your feet."

"Sire," replied Gabrielle, "for heaven's sake go away. Return to Mantes, and never let me see you again so vilely dressed. Always wear your white panache and your scarlet mantle when you come. Without it you are not Henri Quatre. Better

away altogether, for you know well your ies are prowling about in this neighbourhood. ides, who can tell? Bellegarde may come. ay, I entreat you, go away directly."

"*Ma foi!*" replied the King, "let them come, eaguers or Spaniards, Bellegarde or the devil, what care I, if La Belle Gabrielle looks kindly on me? Come down to me, Gabrielle."

"Kind I will certainly not be if your Majesty do not at once depart. Kneeling in that manner is too ridiculous. I will not come down. I shall go away. I am no saint to be prayed to, heaven knows. If your Majesty won't remount, I shall really go away."

"You could not have the heart, Gabrielle," replied Henry, "when I have run such risks to see you for a moment."

His horse stood by cropping the grass. The King leaving the bundle of straw on the ground, sprang into the saddle without even touching the stirrup, and again addressed her. She was terrified at the idea of being surprised by any one, especially Bellegarde, who would have been so incensed, that he might have forgotten himself towards his Majesty.

For a moment Gabrielle was overcome. Tears came into her eyes out of sheer vexation and

fear of consequences, both to him, wh mi
fall into an ambuscade, and to herself. s
lifted up her hands to wipe the tears aw t
scarf she had been embroidering, and whi sh
still held, slipped out of her hand, and born
the wind, after fluttering for a few moments, dro
on the King, who, catching it, exclaimed—

"*Ventre Saint Gris!* what have we here?"

"Oh, Sire!" cried Gabrielle, "it is my work-
a scarf; it is all but finished, and now I hav
dropped it."

"By all the rules of war, fair lady," said Henry, "what falls from the walls of a besieged city belongs to the soldier; so, by your leave, dear Gabrielle, the scarf is mine and I will wear it."

"Oh!" replied she, leaning over the balcony, "do give it me back; it is for Monsieur de Bellegarde, and he knows it. Should he see your Majesty with it, what will he think? He would never believe but that I gave it to you."

"By the mass! it is too good for him; I will keep it without any remorse, and cover with a thousand kisses these stitches woven by your delicate fingers."

"But indeed, Sire, it is promised—Monsieur de Bellegarde will ask me for it; what am I to say?"

"Bellegarde shall never have it, I promise you. Tell me that, like Penelope, you undid in the night what you worked in the day. Come, come, now, Gabrielle, confess you are not in reality so much attached to Bellegarde as you pretend, and that if I can prove to you he is unworthy your preference and inconstant into the bargain, you will promise to give me his place in your heart. Besides, his position is unworthy of your beauty; there is but one ornament worthy of that snowy brow—Bellegarde cannot place it there; but I know another able and willing, when the cursed League is dispersed, to give that finishing touch to your loveliness."

"Sire," replied she, "I must not listen to what you say. I cannot believe anything against Bellegarde; I have known him all my life, and he has never deceived me. Nothing but the most positive evidence shall convince me that he is false."

"How now? *Saints et Saintes!* you doubt my word—the word of a king! But, Gabrielle, I can give you proofs, be assured."

"Oh, Sire, it is not for me to talk of proofs or to reproach him. Poor Bellegarde! my heart bleeds when I think of him." Her head fell upon her bosom, again the tears gathered in her eyes. Then she looked up, and becoming aware all at once

feeling in fear for the King's safety. "Sire, go away, I implore you, return to your quarters as fast as your horse can carry you. If I have been cold, remember what you are risking—your life and my good name! for you will be seen by some one."

"Gabrielle, do you drive me away thus, when to leave you costs me such a pang! Heaven knows when this war will allow us again to meet! I never know from day to day but that some rebel of a Leaguer may finish me by a stray shot; much less do I know where or how I may be. The present is all I have—let me enjoy it."

"Ah, Sire! only put down that atrocious League, and we will meet when you please. I shall offer up no end of prayers that it may be so."

"Whatever comes out of those ruby lips will not fail of being heard; as to your slave Henry, the very knowledge that such a divinity stoops to interest herself in his fate will serve as a talisman to shield him from every danger."

"Your Majesty speaks like a poet," and a soft laugh was heard out of the darkness. "Now adieu, Sire! I wish you a safe journey wherever you go, and may you prevail against your foes.

of my love."

"Ungrateful Gabrielle! thus to trifle with me. But I have proofs, *vrai Dieu!* I have proofs that shall cure you of that attachment."

"Sire, why should you seek to make me unhappy? You know that for years I have been engaged to Bellegarde, and that I look forward to my marriage with the utmost delight. Why, then, endeavour to separate us?"

"*Par exemple, ma belle*, you give me credit for being vastly magnanimous, upon my word! What then, Gabrielle, would you have me resign you without a struggle?—nay, am I expected to bring about your marriage with a rival? That is a little too much, forsooth!"

"*Nenni*, Sire; I only ask you not to prevent it. Such artifice would be unworthy so generous a monarch to a faithful servant like poor Bellegarde, to whom I am"—and she could not help again laughing, so dismal was the look of the King—"to whom I am bound in all honour. Then there is your Majesty's wife, the Queen of Navarre—for, Sire, you seem to forget that you have a wife."

"Yes, as I have a Crown, which I am never to

wear. That infernal Marguerite is keeping her state with a vengeance, and forgetting, *par Dieu, she has a husband.* The people of Usson, in Auvergne, call shame on her, and they know what she is better than I do."

"Sire, I beg of you to speak at least with respect of Madame Marguerite de France."

"Why should I not be frank with you, *ma belle*, at least? *Ah, Margot, la reine Margot, à la bonne heure!* I only wish she were in her coffin at Saint-Denis along with her brothers. I shall be quit of a wife altogether until I enter Paris, and then we shall see—we shall see who will be crowned with me. But, *mignonne*, I must indeed bid you adieu. *Morbleu!* my people will think I am lost, and besiege the château. Adieu until I can next come. I will write to you in the meantime. Remember to forget Bellegarde, as you value the favour of your Sovereign."

And kissing the scarf he had stolen from her, the King put spurs to his horse and galloped away into the darkness.

Gabrielle d'Estrées followed his pernicious counsel but too readily, as the sequel will show. Unable to resist the continued blandishments of the King, and silencing her conscience by a belief in

his promise of marriage, she sacrificed her lover, the Duc de Bellegarde, sincerely and honourably attached to her for many years and whom she had once really loved, for the sake of the gallant but licentious Henry. She followed the King to Mantes, in company with her father, whom the King made General of Artillery and loaded with honours. After this Henry would not hear of her returning to the Château of Cœuvres, a place, he said, too remote and difficult of access. He finally prevailed on her to accompany him to the camp at Saint-Germain.

The Duc de Bellegarde was banished.

In the autumn she was still at Saint-Germain, where the King, in his brief intervals of leisure, showed more and more delight in her society.

One day he entered Gabrielle's apartment, and dismissing his attendants sank into a chair without saying a word. He heaved a deep sigh. Gabrielle looked up at him, wondering at his silence—she perceived that he was weeping. Surprised at his emotion, she asked him, with an offended air, if the sight of her had caused those tears, for if such were the case she would go back to the Castle of Cœuvres, if it so pleased his Majesty.

"*Mignonne*," replied Henry very gravely, taking her hand and kissing it, "it is indeed you who are partly the cause of my grief, but not because you are here. Seeing you makes me envy the happiness of the poorest peasant in my dominions, living on bread and garlic, who is at liberty, has the woman he loves beside him, and is his own master. I am no king, I am nothing but a miserable slave, jostled between Calvinists and Catholics, who both distrust me."

"Come, come Sire, dismiss these fancies, at least while you are with me," answered she.

"On the contrary, Gabrielle, it is the sight of you that recalls them. You have escaped from the control of a father to live with me, while my chains press about me tighter than ever. I cannot, I dare not break them,—and be wholly yours. You gain and I lose—that is all."

"Sire," said she sadly, "I am not sure of that. Women, I believe, are best in the chains you speak of. I shall see. If I have gained, you will keep your promise to me. I am not so certain of it; all I know is, whatever has been or is to be, that I love you," and she turned her languishing blue eyes full upon him.

"Gabrielle, I swear I will keep my promise.

Does not every act of my life prove my devotion?"

"Well then, Sire, succeed in putting down that odious League, march on Paris, and I shall be happy. To see you crowned and anointed at Rheims I would give my life!"

"Never fear, sweet; this will come about shortly, I am certain. There are, however, more difficulties than you are aware of. If I become a Catholic, as all my nobles wish me to do—and beautiful France is well worth a mass—then the Calvinists will at once reorganise this cursed League; and, if I persist in my faith, which my poor mother reared me up to love sincerely—why then I shall be forsaken by all the Catholics; a fact they take care to remind me of every day of my life. *Vrai Dieu!* I only wish I were once again Prince of Navarre, free and joyous, fighting and hunting, dancing and jousting, without an acre of land, as I was formerly."

"Sire, all will be well; be more sanguine, I entreat you. If my poor words have any power over you," she added encouragingly, "dismiss such gloomy thoughts. Believe me, the future has much in store for you and for me."

"Ah! dear Gabrielle, when I am far away over

mountains and valleys, separated from those lovely eyes that now beam so brightly on me, I feel all the torments of jealousy. Away from you, happiness is impossible."

"Well, Sire, if it is only my presence you want, I will follow you to the end of the world—I will go anywhere;" Gabrielle spoke with passionate ardour.

"*Ma mie!* it is this love that alone enables me to bear all the anxieties and troubles that surround me on every side. I value it more than the Crown of France; but this very love of yours, entire as I believe it to be, is the one principal cause of my misery."

"How can that be?" answered she caressingly; "I love you—I will ever be constant, I swear it solemnly, Henry."

"Yes," replied he thoughtfully, "but I have promised you marriage—you must sit beside me as Queen of France. Do you forget that I have the honour of being the husband of a queen—the sister of three defunct monarchs—the most abandoned, the most disgraceful, the most odious——"

"Sire, you need not think about her; you are not obliged to be a witness of her disorders. Let her enjoy all her gallantries at the Castle of Usson.

You can easily divorce her when you please——and then nothing can part us."

"*Ventre Saint Gris!* cursed be the demon who dishonours me by calling herself my wife! that wretch who prevents my marrying the angel whom I love so entirely—your own sweet self!"

"Henry, my heart at least is yours."

"Yes, dearest; but not more mine than I am yours eternally—and I would recompense your love as it deserves. But know, Gabrielle, that Marguerite de Valois absolutely refuses to consent to a divorce that I may marry you. She declares she acts in my interests; but I believe her odious pride is offended at being succeeded by a gentlewoman of honest and ancient lineage, a thousand times better than all the Valois that ever lived, a race born of the devil, I verily believe. I have threatened her with a state trial; the proofs against her are flagrant. She knows that she would in that case be either beheaded or imprisoned for life. Not even that shakes her resolve, so inveterate is she against our union."

"Alas! poor lady—did she ever love you?"

"Not a whit; she was false from the beginning. Let us speak of her no more," said the King, rising and walking up and down the room. Then

stopping opposite Gabrielle, who, dismayed at what she heard, sat with her face buried in her hands, he asked her, "How about Bellegarde?"

Gabrielle shrank back, then looked up at him.

"Are you sure he is entirely banished from your remembrance?"

"As much as if I had never known him," replied she promptly.

"I depend upon your pledge of meeting him no more, because, good-natured as I am—and I am good natured, *par Dieu!*—I am somewhat choleric and hot (God pardon me), and if by chance I ever surprised you together, why, *Vrai Dieu*, if I had my sword I might be sorry for the consequences."

"Sire, there is no danger; you may wear your sword for me. If such a thing ever occurred, it is I who would deserve to die."

"Well, *ma mie*, I must draw the trenches nearer the walls of Paris. In my absence remain at Mantes," said Henry. "Then I must advance upon Rouen. I expect a vigorous resistance, and God only knows how it will end. I leave all in your care, and invest you, fair Gabrielle, with the same power as if you were really queen. Would to heaven you were—confound that devil of a Margot!

I will return to you as often as I can, and write constantly. Now I must say that sad word, adieu. Adieu! adieu! *ma mie.*"

Gabrielle consoled the King as best she could, and after much ado he took his departure, always repeating, "*adieu, ma mie.*"

After he had passed down the great gallery, Gabrielle rushed to one of the windows overlooking the entrance, to catch the last sight of him. She saw him vault on horseback, and ride down the hill with a brilliant retinue; that excellent creature, Chicot the jester, as faithful as Achates, but whom he had the misfortune soon after to lose, close at his side.

CHAPTER XXV.

ITALIAN ART.

YEARS have passed. The wars of the League are over, and Henry is undisputed master of France. He has proved himself a hero in a hundred battles, but has acquired nothing heroic in his appearance. Still in the prime of life, he has the keenest sense of enjoyment, the warmest heart, the old love of danger and contempt of consequences. His time is divided between hunting in the forest of Fontainebleau and the society of Gabrielle d'Estrées, with her little son Cæsar, created Duc de Vendôme.

Gabrielle has nominally been married to the Sieur de Liancourt, in accordance with court etiquette, which did not permit a single lady permanently to form part of a Court without a Queen. Henry has been severely commented on for this marriage mockery, for husband and wife parted at the church door. Gabrielle, who has been created Duchesse de Beaufort, is exceedingly

unpopular. The divorce from "la reine Margot" is still incomplete, that obstinate princess objecting to conclude the needful formalities on the ground that Gabrielle is not of royal blood. Conquered by her prayers, her sweetness, and her devotion, Henry is still resolved to marry his lovely duchess. In vain he urges, threatens, and storms; the tyrant Queen will not consent. By Gabrielle's advice he has become a Catholic. "Ma Gabrielle," he writes from Paris, "I have yielded to your entreaties. I have spoken to the bishops; on Sunday I make *the perilous leap*. I kiss my angel's hand."

A strong political party opposed the marriage. Sully was dead against it. Gabrielle, it was argued, however fascinating and correct in conduct, was no match for Henry the Great. Besides, as being already the mother of two children by the King, a disputed succession would be certain. The Court of Rome had plans of its own, too, about the King's marriage, and already the name of Marie de Medici had been mentioned as a fitting consort. The Pontiff himself favoured the match, and he alone could solve every difficulty with regard to the divorce. Sully looked askance at the excessive influence Gabrielle exercised over his master. The Florentine marriage was approved by him, and

negotiations had already begun. Marie de Medici fulfilled every requirement. She was young, beautiful, rich, and allied to the throne of France by her relative, Catherine de Medici. As long as Gabrielle lived there was no chance of inducing the King to consider seriously any other alliance. Must she die? Poor Gabrielle! there were not wanting foreign noblemen like Maréchal d'Ornano, besides a host of low Italian usurers and Jews brought to France by Catherine de Medici—mere mushrooms who had acquired enormous wealth by pillaging the Court—who lent the King money and pandered to his desires, ready and willing to forward his marriage with a richly dowered princess, their countrywoman, even by a crime.

Gabrielle is at Fontainebleau. She expects the King, who is in Paris. An extraordinary depression, a foreboding of evil, overwhelms her. She knows but too well of the powerful party arrayed against her,—that Sully is her enemy, that the Pope is inflexible about granting the divorce, even if Marguerite de Valois should consent, which she will not whilst Gabrielle lives; she knows that all France is reluctant to receive her as its queen. But there is the King's promise of marriage, repeated again and again with

oaths of passionate fondness. Will he keep that promise of marriage? That is the question. She knows he loves her; but love is but an episode in the chequered life of a soldier-king. How many others has he not loved? How many promises of marriage has he not broken? True, she is always treated as his wife. She lodges in the apartments assigned to the Queen of France in the "Oval Court." She is seated beside him on occasions of state; every favour she asks is granted, all who recommend themselves to her intercession are pardoned. The greatest ladies of the Court—the Duchesse de Guise and her witty daughter, the Duchesse de Retz, even the austere Duchesse de Sully—are proud to attend upon her. Bellegarde, the faithful Bellegarde, restored to favour, now her devoted servant, watches over her interests with ceaseless anxiety. Yet her very soul is heavy within her; her position is intolerable. After all, what is she but the mistress of the King? She shudders at the thought.

The season is spring. The trees are green; their tender foliage but lightly shades the formal walks ranged round a fountain in a little garden (still remaining) that Henry has made for her under the palace walls. The fountain, in the centre of a par-

terre of grass and flowers, catches the rays of the April sun, glitters for an instant in a flood of rainbow tints, then falls back in showers of spray into a marble basin supported by statues.

Gabrielle is dressed in a white robe; the long folds trail upon the ground. Her auburn hair, drawn off her face, is gathered into a coronet of gold; rich lace covers her bosom, and a high ruff rises from her shoulders; on her neck is a string of pearls, to which is attached a miniature of the King. With the years that have passed the bloom of youth is gone; the joyous expression of early days has died out of those soft pleading eyes. Lovely she is still; her complexion delicately fair, and the pensive look in her face is touching to the last degree. Graceful and gracious as ever, there is a sedate dignity, a tempered reserve in her address, befitting the royal station which awaits her.

She stops, sighs, then listens for the sound of horses' feet. There is not a breath stirring, save the hum of insects about the fountain and the murmur of the breeze among the trees. She takes from her bosom a letter. It is in the King's handwriting and shows manifest signs of having

been often handled. She kisses the signature, and reads these words :—

"You conjured me to take with me as much love for you as I know I leave with you for me. Now in two hours after you receive this you shall behold a knight who adores you. People call him King of France and of Navarre, but he calls himself your subject and your slave. No woman can compare to you in judgment or in beauty. I cherish and honour you beyond all earthly things."

A dreamy smile comes over her face. Again she raises her head to listen, and again hears nothing. Wearily she paces round and round the fountain, holding the letter still in her hands. Then she re-enters the palace by an arcaded corridor, and mounting a flight of steps, seats herself in the vestibule to await the King's arrival. At length he enters the court named "The White Horse." Gabrielle is on the terrace to receive him.

"You are late, Sire."

"Yes, sweetheart. I thought I should never get here. The Seine was swollen and we had a saucy ferryman. Come hither, Gabrielle, and I will tell you what he said, while he pulled us across the river. He was a funny rogue."

"Did he not know you then, Sire?"

"No. How should he in this grey doublet and with only a single gentleman? He asked me if we were gallants for the Court. I said Yes, we were bound to Fontainebleau to hunt with the King. 'People say we have a hero for a King,' he said; 'but, *morbleu!* this hero taxes everything. Even the very boat your excellency sits in is taxed. We will pray for him nevertheless; he is an honest King. But it is his mistress, folks say, who wants the money to pay for her fine gauds and dresses. She is but a plain gentlewoman born, after all. If she were a princess now, why then I'd forgive her.' So you see, Gabrielle, when you are a queen, the people will love you and pay the taxes willingly." And Henry laughs and looks at Gabrielle, who has changed colour; but the King does not observe and continues his story. "'Sirrah,' I said to him, 'you malign a charming lady.' 'Devil take her!' replied the churlish ferryman; 'I wish she were in heaven.' So I rode away without paying my toll. The fellow bellowed after me, and ran, but could not catch me. We will call this *drôle* hither, and divert ourselves with him."

As Henry proceeds with his story, Gabrielle's look of pain has deepened.

"I pray your Majesty to do nothing of the

kind," she answers sharply; "I do not love coarse jokes." Henry looks at her with surprise.

"I am wretched enough already, heaven knows, without being mocked by the ribaldry of a low bargeman, who, after all, has reason for what he says. Why did you tell me this story, Henry?" she adds in a plaintive tone, bursting into tears. "Am I not degraded enough already?"

"How, Gabrielle, this from you? when, spite of every obstacle, within a few weeks you will be crowned my queen?"

A knock is now heard at the door, and Sully enters. He looks hot and surly. He barely salutes the King, and scowls at Gabrielle, who instantly retreats to the farther corner of the room. Sully wears a threadbare doublet, his gray hair is uncombed over his forehead, and he carries some papers in his hand.

"Sire," he says, addressing the King abruptly and unfolding these papers, "if you pass this document, you had better declare yourself at once the husband of her grace there, the Duchesse de Beaufort." Sully points at Gabrielle, who cowers in the corner.

Poor Gabrielle is thunderstruck, and trembles at the certainty of a violent scene. She had

often had to bear at different times roughness, and even rudeness, from Sully, but such language as this she had never heard. What does it mean?

The King takes the papers in his hand.

"What are these, Sully?" he says, looking grave. "Bills for the entertainment given by the Duchesse de Beaufort for the baptism of my second son, Alexander, son of France, eight thousand francs! Impossible! Baptismal fees for a son of France? There is no son of France. I wish to God there were! What does all this mean, Sully?"

"It means, Sire, that if you sign that paper, I shall leave the Court."

"Come, come, my good Rosny, you forget that the Duchess is present;" and he glances at Gabrielle, who lay back on the arm-chair, weeping bitterly.

"No, Sire; I mean what I say. My advice is disregarded; I am superseded by a council of women;" and he turns fiercely towards the Duchess. "The nation groans under heavy taxes. Complaints reach me from every quarter. What am I to do, if the revenues are squandered like this?"

Gabrielle's sobs had now become audible. Henry, still holding the paper, looks greatly perplexed.

"The amount is certainly enormous. Some enemy of her grace must have done this. Tell

me, Gabrielle, you cannot have sanctioned it? There are no 'sons of France.' Say to me, Gabrielle, that you were ignorant of all this."

Gabrielle neither speaks nor moves, save that she shakes with sobs. Sully gazes at her with a cynical air as of a man who would not be deceived.

"You see, Rosny," whispers the King into his ear, "that she does not govern me, much as I love her. You do me wrong to say so." Sully shrugged his shoulders. "No, she shall not control you, who only live for my service. I must make her feel that I am displeased. Speak, Gabrielle," he continues aloud, in a voice which he endeavours to make severe, "speak." Receiving no answer he turns away with affected unconcern. Yet in spite of his words, he glances over his shoulder to watch her. Had Sully not been present, he would have flown to her on the spot and yielded. This Sully well knew; so he did not stir.

There is an awkward pause. Horrible suspicions rush into Gabrielle's mind. That strange story of the ferryman and the taxes; Sully's audacious language; the King's coldness: it could only mean one thing, and as this conviction comes over her, her heart dies within her.

"Sire," she answers at last, suppressing her sobs as she best could and approaching where Henry stood, affecting not to notice her, "I see that you have permitted the Duc de Sully to come here in order to insult me. You want to abandon me, Sire. Say so frankly; it is more worthy of you. But remember that I am not here by my own wish, save for the love I bear you." As she utters these words her voice nearly failed her; but by a strong effort she continues, "No one can feel more forlorn than I do. Your Majesty has promised me marriage against the advice of your ministers. This scene is arranged between you to justify you in breaking your sacred word, else you could never allow the lady whom you design for so high an honour to be thus treated in your very presence."

Henry, placed between Sully and Gabrielle, is both angry and embarrassed. Her bitter words have stung him to the quick. He knows that she has no cause to doubt his loyalty.

"*Pardieu*, madame, you have made me a fine speech. You talk all this nonsense to make me dismiss Rosny. If I must choose between you, let me tell you, Duchesse, I can part with you better than with him." Gabrielle turns very pale, and clings to a chair for support. "Come, Rosny, we

will have a ride in the forest, and leave the Duchesse to recover her usually sweet temper;" and without one look at her, Henry strode towards the door.

These bitter words are more than his gentle mistress can bear. With a wild scream she rushed forward, and fell flat upon the floor at the King's feet. Henry, greatly moved, gathers her up tenderly in his arms. Even the stern Sully relents. He looked at her sorrowfully, shook his head, collected his papers, and departed.

The Holy-week is at hand. Gabrielle, who is to be crowned within a month, is to communicate and keep her Easter publicly at Paris, while the King remains at Fontainebleau. An unaccountable terror of Paris and a longing desire not to leave the King overwhelm her. Again and again she alters the hour of her departure. She takes Henry's hand and wanders with him to the Orangery, to the lake where the carp are fed, to the fountain garden, and to the Salle de Diane, which he is building. She cannot tear herself from him. She speaks much to him of their children, and commends them again and again to his love. She adjures him not to forget her during her absence.

"Why! *ma belle des belles!*" exclaims the King, "one would think you were going round the world;

remember, in ten days I shall join you in Paris, and then my Gabrielle shall return to Fontainebleau as Queen of France. I have ordered that *bon diable* Zametti, to receive you at Paris as though you were already crowned."

Now Zametti was an Italian Jew from Genoa, who had originally come to France in the household of Catherine de Medici, as her shoemaker. He had served her and all her sons in that capacity, until Henry III., amused by his jests, and perceiving him to be a man of no mean talents, gave him a place in the Customs. Zametti's fortune was made, and he became henceforth usurer and money-lender in chief to the reigning monarch.

"I love not Zametti," replies Gabrielle, shuddering. "I wish I were going to my aunt, Madame de Sourdis, she always gives me good advice. Cannot your Majesty arrange that it should be so still?"

"It is too late, sweetheart. I do not like Madame de Sourdis; she is not a fitting companion for my Gabrielle. Zametti has, by my orders, already prepared his house for your reception, and certain *parures* for your approval; besides, what objection can you have to Zametti, the most courteous and amusing of men?"

"Alas! Henry, I cannot tell; but I dread him. I would I were returned. I feel as though I were entering a tomb. I am haunted by the most dismal fancies."

She drives through the forest accompanied by the King, who rides beside her litter, attended by the Ducs de Retz, Roquelaure, Montbazon, and the Maréchal d'Ornano, to Mélun, where a royal barge awaits her, attended by a flotilla of boats decorated with flags and streamers in the Venetian style. Here they take a tender farewell; again and again Gabrielle throws herself upon the King's neck and whispers through her tears that they will never meet again. Henry laughs, but, seeing her agitation, would have accompanied her and have braved the religious prejudices of the Parisians, had it not been for the entreaties of d'Ornano. Almost by force is he restrained. Gabrielle embarks; he stands watching her as the barge is towed rapidly through the stream; one more longing, lingering look she casts upon him, then disappears from his sight. Downcast and sorrowful the King rides back to Fontainebleau.

All night long Gabrielle is towed up the river. She arrives at Paris in the morning. Zametti, the Italian usurer and jeweller, with a numerous suite

of nobles and attendants, is waiting on the quay to receive her. She is carried to Zametti's house or rather palace, for it was a princely abode, near the Arsenal, in the new quarter of Paris then called the Marais.

Here unusual luxuries await her, such as were common only in Italy and among Italian princes: magnificent furniture, embroidered stuffs, delicious perfumes, rich dishes. She rests through the day (the evening having been passed in the company of the Duchesse de Guise and her daughter), and the first night she sleeps well. Next day she rises early and goes to church. Before she leaves the house, Zametti presents her with a highly decorated filigree bottle, containing a strong perfume.

Before the service is over she faints. She is carried back and placed, by her own desire, in Zametti's garden, under a tuft of trees. She calls for refreshments. Again in the garden she sinks back insensible. This time it is very difficult to revive her. When she recovers, she is undressed and orders a litter to be instantly prepared to bear her to her aunt's house, which is situated near Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, close to the Louvre.

In the meantime her head aches violently, but she is carried to her aunt's, where she is put to

bed. Here she lies with her sweet eyes wide open and turned upward, her beautiful face livid, and her mouth distorted. In her anguish she calls incessantly for the King. He cannot come for it is Holy-week, which he must pass out of her company. She tries to write to him, to tell him of her condition. The pen drops from her hand. A letter from him is given her; she cannot read it. Convulsions come on, and she expires insensible.

That she died poisoned is certain. Poisoned either by the subtle perfume in the filigree bottle, or by some highly flavoured dish of Zametti's Italian *cuisine*.

CHAPTER XXVI.

BIRON'S TREASON.

THE scene is again at Fontainebleau. Henry's brow is knit. He is gloomy and sad. With slow steps he quits the palace by the Golden Gate, passes through the parterre garden under the shadow of the lime *berceau* which borders the long façade of the palace, and reaches a pavilion under a grove of trees overlooking the park and the canal. This pavilion is the house he has built for Sully. The statesman is seated writing in an upper chamber overlooking the avenues leading to the forest.

The King enters unannounced; he throws his arms round Sully, then sinks into a chair. Sully looks at him unmoved. He is accustomed to outbreaks of passion and remorse caused by the King's love affairs, and he mentally ascribes his master's present trouble to this cause. "Sully," says Henry, speaking at last, "I am betrayed, betrayed by my

dearest friend. *Ventre de ma vie!* Maréchal Biron has conspired against me, with Spain."

"How, Sire?" cries Sully, bounding from his chair; "have you proofs?"

"Ay, Sully, only too complete; his agent and secretary Lafin has confessed everything. Lafin is now at Fontainebleau. I have long doubted the good faith of Biron, but I must now bring myself to hold him as a traitor."

"If your Majesty has sufficient proofs," said Sully, re-seating himself, "have him at once arrested. Allow him no time to communicate with your enemies."

"No, Sully, no; I cannot do that: I must give my old friend a chance. Of his treason, there is, however, no question. He has intrigued for years with the Duke of Savoy and with Spain, giving out as his excuse that the Catholic faith is endangered by my heresy, and that I am a Calvinist. He has entered into a treasonable alliance with Bouillon and d'Auvergne; and worse, oh, far worse than all, during the campaign in Switzerland he commanded the battery of St. Catherine's Fort to be pointed against me.—God knows how I was saved."

"Monstrous!" cries Sully, casting up his

hands. "And your Majesty dallies with such a miscreant?"

"Yes, I can make excuses for him. He has been irritated against me by the base insinuations of the Duke of Savoy. Biron is vain, hot-tempered, and credulous. I know every detail. He shall come here to Fontainebleau: I have summoned him. The sight of his old master will melt his heart. He will confide in me; he will confess, and I shall pardon him."

"I trust it may be as your Majesty wishes," answers Sully; "but you are playing a dangerous game, Sire. God help you safe out of it."

Biron, ignorant of the treachery of Lafin, arrives at Fontainebleau. He reckons on the King's ignorance and their old friendship, and trusts to a confident bearing and a bold denial of all charges. They meet—the Maréchal and the King—in the great parterre, where, it being the month of June, sweetly scented herbs and gay flowers fill the diamonded beds—under the lime berceau surrounding the garden. Biron, perfectly composed, makes three low obeisances to the King, then kisses his hand. Henry salutes him. His eyes are moist as he looks at him. "You have done well to confide in me," he says; "I am very glad to see you,

Biron," and he passes his arm round the Maréchal's neck, and draws him off to describe to him the many architectural plans he has formed for the embellishment of the château, and to show him the great "gallery of Diana" which is in course of decoration. He hopes that Biron will understand his feelings, and that kindness will tempt him to confess his crime. Biron, however, is convinced that if he braves the matter out, he will escape; he ascribes Henry's clemency to an infatuated attachment to himself. He wears an unruffled brow, is cautious and plausible though somewhat silent, carefully avoids all topics which might lead to discussion of any matters touching his conduct, and pointedly disregards the hints thrown out from time to time by the King. Henry is miserable; he feels he must arrest the Maréchal. Sully urges him to lose no time. Still his generous heart longs to save his old friend and companion in arms.

Towards evening the Court is assembled in the great saloon. The King is playing a game of primero. Biron enters. He invites him to join; Biron accepts, and takes up the cards with apparent unconcern. The King watches him; is silent and absent, and makes many mistakes in the game. The clock strikes

eleven, Henry rises, and taking Biron by the arm, leads him into a small retiring-room or cabinet at the bottom of the throne-room, now forming part of that large apartment. The King closes the door carefully. His countenance is darkened by excitement and anxiety. His manner is so constrained and unnatural that Biron begins to question himself as to his safety; still he sees no other resource but to brave his treason out. "My old companion," says the King, in an unsteady voice, standing in the centre of the room, "you and I are countrymen; we have known each other from boyhood. We were playfellows. I was then the poor Prince de Béarn, and you, Biron, a cadet of Gontaut. Our fortunes have changed since then. I am a great king, and you are a Duke and Maréchal of France." Biron bows; his confident bearing does not fail him.

"Now, Biron," and Henry's good-natured face grows stern—"I have called you here to say, that if you do not instantly confess the truth (and all the truth, instantly mind), you will repent it bitterly. I was in hopes you would have done so voluntarily, but you have refused.—Now I can wait no longer."

"Sire, I have not failed in my duty," replies

Biron haughtily; "I have nothing to confess; you do me injustice."

"Alas, my old friend, this denial does not avail you. I know *all!*"—and Henry sighs and fixes his eyes steadfastly upon him. "I conjure you to make a voluntary confession, and to spare me the pain of your public trial. I have kept the matter purposely secret. I will not disgrace you, if possible."

"Sire," answers Biron, with a well-simulated air of offended dignity, "I have already said I have nothing to confess. I can only beseech your Majesty to confront me with my accusers."

"That cannot be done without public disgrace —without danger to your life, Maréchal. Come, Biron," he adds, in a softer tone, and turning his eyes upon him where he stands before him, dogged and obstinate; "come, my old friend, believe me, every detail is known to me; your life is in my hand."

"Sire, you will never have any other answer from me. Where are my accusers?"

"Avow all, Biron, fearlessly," continues Henry, in the same tone, as if not hearing him. "Open your heart to me;—I can make allowances for you, perchance many allowances. You have been told

lies, you have been sorely tempted. Open your heart,—I will screen you."

"Sire, my heart is true. Remember it was I who first proclaimed you king, when you had not a dozen followers at Saint-Cloud," Biron speaks with firmness, but avoids the piercing glance of the King; "I shall be happy to answer any questions, but I have nothing to confess."

"*Ventre Saint Gris!*" cries Henry, reddening, "are you mad? Confess at once—make haste about it. If you do not, I swear by the crown I wear to convict you publicly as a felon and a traitor. But I would save you, Maréchal," adds Henry in an altered voice, laying his hand upon his arm, "God knows I would save you, if you will let me. *Pardieu!* I will forgive you all!" he exclaims, in an outburst of generous feeling.

"Sire, I can only reply—confront me with my accusers. I am your Majesty's oldest friend. I have no desire but the service of your Majesty."

"Would to God it were so!" exclaims the King, turning upon Biron a look of inexpressible compassion. Then moving towards the door he opens it, and looks back at Biron, who still stands where he has left him, with his arms crossed, in the centre of the room. "Adieu, *Baron* de

Biron!"—and the King emphasises the word "Baron," his original title before he had received titles and honours—"adieu! I would have saved you had you let me—your blood be on your own head." The door closed—Henry was gone.

Biron gave a deep sigh of relief, passed his hand over his brow, which was moist with perspiration, and prepared to follow.

As he was passing the threshold, Vitry, the Captain of the Guard, seized him by the shoulder, and wrenched his sword from its scabbard. "I arrest you, Duc de Biron!"

Biron staggered, and looked up with astonishment. "This must be some jest, Vitry!"

"No jest, monseigneur. In the King's name, you are my prisoner."

"As a peer of France, I claim my right to speak with his Majesty!" cried Biron loudly. "Lead me to the King!"

"No, Duke; the King is gone—his Majesty refuses to see you again."

Once in the hands of justice, Biron vainly solicited the pardon which Henry would gladly have granted. He was arraigned before the parliament, convicted of treason, and beheaded at the

Bastille *privately*, the only favour he could obtain from the master he had betrayed.

* * * * *

The pleasant days are now long past when Henry wandered, disguised as a Spaniard or a peasant, together with Bellegarde and Chicot in search of adventures—when he braved the enemy to meet Gabrielle, and escaped the ambuscades of the League by a miracle. He lives principally at the Louvre, and is always surrounded by a brilliant Court. He has grown clumsy and round-shouldered, and shows much of the Gascon swagger in his gait. He is coarse-featured and red-faced; his hair is white; his nose seems longer—in a word, he is uglier than ever. His manners are rougher, and he is still more free of tongue. There is a senile leer in his eyes, peering from under the tuft of feathers that rests on the brim of his felt hat, as, cane in hand, he passes from group to group of deeply curtseying beauties in the galleries of the Louvre. He has neither the chivalric bearing of Francis I., nor the refined elegance of the Valois princes. Beginning with his first wife, "la reine Margot," the most fascinating, witty, and depraved princess of her day, his experience of the sex has been various. The only woman who really loved him

was poor Gabrielle, and to her alone he had been tolerably constant. Her influence over him was gentle and humane, and, although she sought to legalise their attachment by marriage, she was singularly free from pride or personal ambition.

Now she is dead. He has wedded a new wife, Marie de Medici, whose ample charms and imperious ways are little to his taste. "We have married you, Sire," said Sully to him, entering his room one day, bearing the marriage contract in his hand; "you have only to affix your signature." "Well, well," Henry had replied, "so be it. If the good of France demands it, I will marry." Nevertheless, he had bitten his nails furiously and stamped up and down the room for some hours, like a man possessed. Ever reckless of consequences, he consoles himself by plunging deeper than ever into a series of intrigues which compromise his dignity and create endless difficulties and dangers.

What complicated matters was his readiness to promise marriage. He would have had more wives than our Henry VIII. could he have made good all his engagements. Gabrielle would have been his queen in a few weeks had not the subtle poison of Zametti, the Italian usurer, cleared her from the path of the Florentine bride. Even in the short

interval between her death and the landing of Marie de Medici at Marseilles, he had yielded to the wiles of Henriette de Balsac d'Entragues, half-sister to the Comte d'Auvergne, son of Charles IX., and had given her a formal promise of marriage.

Henriette cared only for the sovereign, not for the man, who was old enough to be her father. In the glory of youth and insolence of beauty, stealthy, clever, and remorseless, a finished coquette and a reckless *intrigante*, she allured him into signing a formal contract of marriage, affianced though he was to a powerful princess proposed by the reigning Pontiff, whose good-will it was important to the King, always a cold Catholic, to secure.

The new favourite claimed to be of royal blood through her mother, Marie Touchet, and therefore a fitting consort for the King. She showed her "marriage lines" to every one—did not hesitate to assert that she, not Marie de Medici, was the lawful wife; that the King would shortly acknowledge her as such, and send the Queen back whence she came, together with the hated Concini, her chamber-woman and secretary, along with all the jesters and mountebanks who had come with her from Italy. Endless complications ensued with

the new Queen. Quarrels, recriminations, and reproaches ran so high that Marie on one occasion struck the King in the face. Henry was disgusted with her ill-temper, but was too generous either to coerce or to control her. Her Italian confidants, Concini and his wife, however, made capital of these dissensions to incense Marie violently against her husband, and at the same time to gain influence over herself. Henry was watched, —no very difficult undertaking, as he had assigned a magnificent suite of rooms in the Louvre to his new mistress, between whose apartments and those of the wife there was but a single corridor.

Henriette meanwhile lived with all the pomp of a sovereign; there were feasts at Zametti's, balls, and jousts, and hunting-parties at Saint-Germain and Fontainebleau. Foreign ambassadors and ministers scoured the country after the King; so engaged was he in pleasure and junketing.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A COURT MARRIAGE.

The great gallery of the Louvre is just completed. It is on the first floor, and approached through a circular hall with a fine mosaic floor; it has painted walls and a vaulted ceiling. This gallery is lighted by twelve lofty windows looking towards the quays and the river, which glitters without in the morning sun. Every inch of this sumptuous apartment is painted and laden with gilding; the glittering ceiling rests upon a cornice, where Henry's initials are blended with those of the dead Gabrielle. A crowd of lords-in-waiting and courtiers walk up and down, loll upon settees, or gather in groups within the deep embrasures of the windows, to discuss in low tones the many scandals of the day, as they await his Majesty's lever. Presently Maréchal Bassompierre enters. Bassompierre, the friend and confidant of Henry, as great a libertine as his master, who has left behind him a minute chronicle

of his life, is a tall, burly man; his face is bronzed by the long campaigns against the League, and his bearing as he moves up and down, his sword clanging upon the polished floor, has more of the swagger of the camp than the refinement of the Court. He wears the uniform of the Musketeers who guard the person of the King, and on his broad breast is the ribbon of the Order of the "Saint-Esprit." He is joined by the Duc de Roquelaure. Now Roquelaure is an effeminate-looking man, a gossip and a dandy, the retailer of the latest scandal, the block upon which the newest fashions are tried. He wears a doublet of rose-coloured Florence satin quilted with silk, stiff with embroidery and sown with seed-pearls. The sleeves are slashed with cloth of silver; a golden chain, with a huge medallion set in diamonds, hangs round his neck. Placed jauntily over his ear is a velvet cap with a jewelled clasp and white ostrich plume. Broad golden lace borders his hose, and high-heeled Cordovan boots—for he desires to appear tall—of amber leather, with huge golden spurs, complete his attire. Being a man of low stature—a pigmy beside the Marshal—as the sun streams upon him from the broad window-panes, he looks like a gaudy human butterfly.

"Well, Bassompierre," says the Duke eagerly,

standing on the points of his toes, "is it true that your marriage with the incomparable Charlotte de Montmorenci is broken off?"

Bassompierre bows his head in silence, and a sorrowful look passes over his jovial face.

"*Pardieu!* Marshal, for a rejected lover you seem well and hearty. Are you going to break your heart, or the Prince of Condé's head—eh, Marshal?"

A malicious twinkle gathers in Roquelaure's eye, for there is a certain satisfaction to a man of his inches in seeing a giant like Bassompierre unsuccessful.

"Neither, Duke," replies Bassompierre drily. "I shall in this matter, as in all others, submit myself to his Majesty's pleasure."

"Mighty well spoken, Marshal; you are a perfect model of court virtue. But how can a worshipper of 'the great Alexander,' at the court of 'Lutetia,' in the very presence of the divine Millegarde, the superb Dorinda, and all the attendant knights and ladies, tolerate the affront, the dishonour of a public rejection?" And Roquelaure takes out an enamelled snuff-box, taps it, and with a pinch of scented snuff between fingers covered with rings awaits a reply. "Not but that any gentleman," continues he, receiving no answer,

"who marries the fair Montmorenci will have perforce to submit to his Majesty's pleasure—eh, Marshal, you understand?" and Roquelaure takes his pinch of snuff and strokes his perfumed beard.

"I cannot allow the lady to be made a subject for idle gossip, Duke," replies Bassompierre, drawing himself up to his full height and eyeing the other grimly. "Although I am not to have the honour of being her husband, her good name is as dear to me as before."

"But, *morbleu!* who blames the lady?"

"Not I—I never blamed a lady in my life, let her do what she may—it is my creed of honour."

"But his Majesty's passion for her is so unconcealed. Perhaps, Marshal, the King understood that this marriage must break up your ancient friendship?"

Bassompierre scowls, but makes no reply.

"The King has grown young again," continues Roquelaure. "Our noble Henri Quatre,—he orders new clothes every day, wears embroidered collars, sleeves of carnation satin—(I brought in the mode)" and he glances at his own—"and scents and perfumes his hair and beard. We are to have another tournament to-morrow in honour of the marriage of the Prince de Condé—in reality to show off a

suit of armour his Majesty has received from Milan. Will you have the heart to be present, Marshal?"

"Yes, Duke, I shall attend his Majesty as usual," replies Bassompierre, turning away with an offended air.

"Come, Marshal, between such old friends as you and I these airs of distance are absurd;" and the Duke lays his hand on the other's arm to detain him. "Own to me honestly that this marriage with the Prince de Condé gives you great concern——"

Bassompierre hangs down his head and plays with his sword-knot. "I should have desired a better husband for her, truly," answers he in a low voice. "The Prince is a shabby fellow, with an evil temper. I fear Mademoiselle de Montmorenci can never affect him," and a deep sigh escapes him.

"Never, never," rejoins Roquelaure, looking round to note who arrives, "it is an ill-assorted union. You, Bassompierre, would have loved her well. It was possible she might have reformed your manners. Ha! I have you there, Marshal. Pardon my joke," adds he, as he sees a dark scowl again gathering on the Marshal's face. "But Condé, the *rustre*, he hates women—I never saw him address one in his life; a cold, austere fellow,

as solitary as an owl; a miser, and silent too—if he does speak he is rude and ungracious; and with the temper of a fiend. If he does right, it is only through obstinacy. I am told he suspects the lady already, and has set spies to watch her. A pretty match for the fair Montmorenci truly, who has lived with a sovereign at her feet."

"Duke," cries Bassompierre fiercely, secretly writhing under the Duke's malicious probing of a heart-wound which still bled, "I have already observed that any inuendoes touching Mademoiselle de Montmorenci displease me."

"Inuendoes! why, Marshal, even Condé confessed the other day that rich as was the prize, and surpassing the lady, he hesitated to accept 'one whom the King's attention had made so notorious!'"

Bassompierre's eyes flash. He is about to make an angry rejoinder when a page approaches and summons them to attend his Majesty.

The marriage between Charlotte de Montmorenci and the Prince de Condé was, as had been anticipated, a failure. Condé, devoured by jealousy, shut up his wife at Chantilly, or at the still more remote Château of Muret. The petted beauty, accustomed to the incense of a Court and the avowed

admiration of an infatuated sovereign, scolded and wept, but in vain. The more bitterly they quarrelled, the more deep and dangerous became Condé's enmity to Henry. Disloyalty was the tradition of his race, rebellious practices with Spain the habit of his house. We have seen how a Condé was ready to usurp the throne under pretence of a Regency, during the conflict with the Huguenots at Amboise. His son, "the great Condé," is by-and-by to head the standard of revolt, and at the head of Spanish troops to bring France to the brink of ruin. Avarice had led him to accept the hand of Charlotte de Montmorenci—avarice and poverty—and he had counted upon constant espionage and absence from Court as sufficient precautions. But he was young: he had yet to learn the wilfulness of his wife and the audacity of the King. As he gradually discovered that the Princess was neither to be soothed nor coerced, his rage knew no bounds. Sully, seriously alarmed at the rumours that reached him respecting the Prince's language, requested a visit from him at the Arsenal.

Sully is seated in a sombre closet—looking towards the towers of Notre-Dame—at a table covered with papers. Condé is tall, thin, and slightly made. He is singularly ill-favoured, with

dark hair and skin, a nose quite out of proportion with the rest of his face, and a sinister expression in his eyes. On entering he cannot conceal his uneasiness.

"Be seated, monseigneur," says Sully, scanning him from under his heavy eyebrows. "I have no time to spare—therefore I must use plain words. You speak of the King my master in terms that do you little credit. You are playing the devil, Prince. The King's patience is well-nigh exhausted. I am commanded to keep back the payment of the pension you receive to mark his Majesty's displeasure. If this has no effect upon you, other means must be tried."

While Sully speaks, Condé sits opposite to him unmoved, save that his swarthy face hardens, and he fixes his sullen eyes steadfastly upon Sully.

"If I am what you say," replies he at last doggedly, "if I speak ill of his Majesty, am I not justified? He is determined to ruin me. He persecutes me because I choose to keep my wife in the country. It is my desire to leave France—then I shall no longer give his Majesty offence."

"Impossible, monseigneur! As a Prince of the blood your place is at Court, beside the Sovereign."

"What! have I not liberty even to visit my own

sister, the Princess of Orange, at Breda, in company with the Princess, my wife? That can be no affront to his Majesty. Surely, Monsieur de Sully, you cannot advise the King to refuse so reasonable a request?"

"I shall advise him to refuse it, monseigneur, nevertheless. Persons of your rank cannot leave the kingdom—the very act is treason."

Condé casts up his eyes, and his hands—

"Was ever a man so ill used? My personal liberty denied me! My very allowance stopped!"

"It is said, Prince, that you have plenty of Spanish doubloons at Chantilly," returns Sully significantly.

"It is false—tales to ruin me. Ever since my marriage I have been pursued by informers. It was by his Majesty's command I married. Now he desires to seduce my wife—that is the truth. If I appear ungrateful, there is my reason."

"His Majesty assures me, Prince," breaks in Sully, "that his sentiments towards your illustrious consort are those of a father."

"A father! Why, then, does he come disguised to Chantilly? He has been seen hiding in the woods there and at Muret. A pretty father, indeed! By the grace of God, I will submit to the tyranny

of no such a father. It is a thraldom unbecoming my birth, my position, and my honour! While the King acts thus I will not come to Court, to be an object of pity and contempt!"

"You speak of tyranny, Prince, towards yourself. It may be well for your highness to consider, however, that the King, my master, has to a certain extent justified your accusation." Condé looks up at him keenly. "But it is tyranny exercised in your favour, Monsieur le Prince, not to your prejudice."

Sully's eyes are bent upon the Prince. While he speaks a half smile flitters about his mouth.

"I do not understand you, Duke. Explain yourself," replies Condé, with real or affected ignorance; but something in the expression of Sully's face caused him to drop the tone of bravado he had hitherto assumed.

"His Majesty, Prince, has justified your accusation of tyranny by having hitherto insisted, nay even compelled, those about him to acknowledge you—well—for what you are not!"

Condé almost bounds from his seat. There was a horrible suspicion that his mother had shortened his father's life, and this suspicion had cast doubts upon his legitimacy.

Sully sits back in his chair, and contemplates Condé at his ease.

"Your highness will, I think, do well for the future to consider how much you owe to his Majesty's bounty in many ways." And these last words are strongly emphasised. Condé is silent. "Again, I say, as your highness is fortunately accepted as a Prince of the blood, you must bear the penalties of this high position."

Condé, who has turned ashy pale, rises with difficulty—he even holds the table for support.

"Have you more to say to me, Duc de Sully, or is our interview ended?"

He speaks in a suppressed voice, and looks careworn and haggard.

"Monseigneur, I have now only to thank you for the honour you have done me in coming here," replies Sully, rising, a malicious smile upon his face. "I commend to your consideration the remarks I have had the honour to make to you. Believe me, you owe everything to the King, my master."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE PREDICTION FULFILLED.

HENRY was seated in his closet playing at cards, in company with Bassompierre, the Comtes de Soissons, Cœuvres, and Monseigneur de Lorraine. It was late, and the game was almost concluded, when Monsieur d'Ellène, a gentleman-in-waiting, entered hurriedly, and whispered something in the King's ear. In an instant Henry's face expressed the utmost consternation. He threw down his cards, clenched his fists with passion, and rose hastily; then, leaning over upon Bassompierre's shoulder, who sat next to him, he said in a low voice—

"Marshal, I am lost. Condé has fled with his wife into the woods. God knows whether he means to murder her, or carry her out of France. Take care of my cards. Go on playing. I must learn more particulars. Do the same, and follow me as soon as you can." And he left the room.

But the sudden change in the King's face and manner had spread alarm in the circle. No one would play any more, and Bassompierre was assailed with eager questions. He was obliged to reply that he believed the Prince de Condé had left France. At this astounding news every tongue was let loose. Bassompierre then retired, and after having made himself master of every particular, joined the King, in order to inform him. Henry listened with horror to Bassompierre's narrative. Meanwhile, late as it was (midnight), he commanded a council of state to be called. The ministers assembled as quickly as was possible. There were present the Chancellor, the President Jeannin, Villeroy, and the Comtes de Cœuvres and de Cremail. Henry hastily seated himself at the top of the table.

"Well, Chancellor, well—you have heard this dreadful news," said he, addressing him. "The poor young Princess! What is your advice? How can we save her?"

Bellièvre, a grave lawyer, looked astounded at the King's vehemence.

"Surely, Sire, you cannot apprehend any personal danger to the illustrious lady?" said he, with hesitation. "The Princesse de Condé is with her husband, he will doubtless act as is fitting."

"*Ventre Sant Gris!*" cried the King, boiling with passion. "I want no comments—the remedy. What is the remedy? How can we rescue her?"

"Well, Sire, if you have reason to misdoubt the good faith of the Prince de Condé, if her highness be in any danger, you must issue edicts, proclaim fines, and denounce all persons who harbour and abet him; but I would advise your Majesty to pause."

Henry turned away with a violent gesture.

"Now, Villeroy, speak. If the Princess is out of the kingdom, what is to be done?"

"Your Majesty can do nothing then but through your ambassadors. Representation must be made to the Court of the country whither the Prince has fled. You must demand the Prince's restitution as a rebel."

The King shrugged his shoulders with infinite disgust. Such slow measures little suited his impetuous humour.

"Now, President Jeannin," said Henry, "let us hear your opinion. These other counsels are too lengthy. God knows what mischief may ere this have happened."

"I advise your Majesty," replied the President, "to send a trusty officer after the Prince and bring

him back along with his wife, if within the realm. He is doubtless on his way to Flanders. If he has passed the frontier, the Archduke, who would not willingly offend your Majesty, will, doubtless, dismiss the Prince at your desire."

Henry nodded his head approvingly, and turned quickly round to issue orders at once to follow this advice, which suited the urgency of the case; then all at once he remembered that Sully was not present, and he hesitated.

"Where is Sully?" cried he.

"Monsieur de Praslin," replied Bassompierre, who had just left him, "has been again dispatched to fetch him from the Arsenal; but he is not yet arrived."

At this moment the door opened, and Sully appeared. It was evident that he was in one of his surliest moods. Henry, preoccupied as he was, observed this, and, fearing some outburst, dismissed the Council and Bassompierre, and carefully shut the door.

"Sully, what am I to do? By the mass! that monster, my nephew, has fled, and carried off my dear Charlotte with him."

This was not, as has been seen, the first time that the grave statesman Sully had been consulted in

his master's love affairs. He had passed very many hours in endeavouring to cajole Henriette d'Entragues to give up the fatal marriage contract signed by the King; he had all but quarrelled with his master in opposing his marriage with Gabrielle d'Estrées; and he had been called up in the dead of night to remonstrate with the Queen when, in consequence of a violent quarrel, she had sworn that she would leave the Louvre. Sully, like the King, had grown old, and was tired of acting adviser to a headstrong master, whose youthful follies never seemed to end. Now he gave a grunt of disapproval.

"I am not surprised, Sire. I told you the Prince would go. If he went himself, it was not likely he would leave his wife behind him—was it? That would have been too complaisant in his highness. If you wanted to secure him, you should have shut him up in the Bastille."

"Sully, this raillery is ill-timed. I am distressed beyond all words. The Princess is in an awful predicament. Laperrière's son brought the news. His father was their guide. He left them in the middle of a dismal forest. He shall be paid a mine of gold for his information."

Sully shook his head and cast up his hands.

"God help us!" muttered he.

"Never was anything more dreadful," continued the King. "My beloved Charlotte was lured from Muret under the pretence of a hunting-party. She was to be carried to the rendezvous in a coach. The dear creature started before daylight, says Laperrière's son, and as the morning broke, found herself in a strange part of the country—in a plain far from the forest. She stopped the coach, and called to Virrey, who rode by the door, and asked him whither they were going? Virrey grew confused, and said he would ride on and ask the Prince, who was in advance, leading the way, the cowardly scoundrel!" and Henry shook his fist in the air. "My nephew came up, and told her she was on her road to Breda, upon which the sweet soul screamed aloud, says Laperrière, and lamented, entreating to be allowed to return. But that ruffian, Condé, rode off and left her in the middle of the road, bidding the driver push forward. At last they came to Couçy, where they changed horses. Just as they were about again to start the coach broke down."

"Praised be God!" ejaculated Sully. "I hope no one was found to mend it."

"Sully, I believe you are without heart or feeling," cried the King reproachfully.

"Not at all, Sire; but my heart and my feelings also are with your Majesty, not with the Princess. Proceed, Sire, with this touching narrative."

"Condé then, says Laperrière, the night beginning to fall, purchased a pillion at Coucy, and mounted his wife behind him on horseback." Sully shook with laughter; but fearing to offend his master, suppressed it as well as he could. "Her two attendants mounted behind two of the suite, the guides being in advance. It rained heavily. *Pardieu!* I can hardly bear to speak of it. My dear Charlotte in such a condition! The night was dark; but Condé rode on like a devil incarnate to Castellin, the first village across the frontier. When she was taken down, Charlotte fainted." The tears ran down Henry's cheeks as he said this. "She fainted; and then Laperrière, convinced of some treason on the part of my nephew, dispatched his son to tell me these particulars. Now, Sully," and the King rose suddenly and seized his hand, shaking off the sorrow that had overcome him during the narrative, "now tell me, what am I to do? I would lose my Crown rather than not succour her."

"Do nothing, Sire," replied Sully quietly.

"How, Sully! Do nothing?"

"Yes, Sire; I advise you—I implore you, do nothing. If you leave Condé to himself he will be laughed at. Even his friends will ridicule his escapade. In three months he will be back again at Court with the Princess, ashamed of himself. Meantime Madame la Princesse will see foreign Courts, acquire the Spanish manner from the Archduchess, and return more fascinating than ever. On the other hand, if you pursue him, you will exalt him into a political victim; all your Majesty's enemies will rally round him."

Excellent advice, which the King was too infatuated to follow! Forgetting all decency, and even the law of nations, he insisted on punishing Condé as a rebel, and called on the Spanish Government formally to release the Princess. Spain refused; and this ridiculous passion may be said to have been the approximate cause of that formidable alliance against Spain in which, at the time of his death, Henry was about to engage.

The favour which Henry had shown his Protestant subjects had long rankled in the minds of the Catholics. He was held to be a renegade and a traitor. It was affirmed that his conversion was a sham, to which he lent himself only the more effectually to advance the interests of the reformed faith.

While he gave himself up to amorous follies and prepared for foreign wars, a network of hate, treachery, and fanaticism was fast closing around him. Enemies and spies filled the Louvre, and dogged his every movement. Already the footsteps of the assassin approached.

After the birth of the Dauphin a strong political party had gathered round Marie de Medici. Her constant dissensions with the King, her bitter complaints, and the scandal of his private life, afforded sufficient grounds for elevating her into a kind of martyr.

The intrigues of Concini, whose easy manners, elegant person, and audacious counsels had raised him from a low hanger-on at Court into the principal adviser of his royal mistress, gradually contrived to identify her interests with those of the great feudal princes, still absolute sovereigns in their own territory. The maintenance of the Catholic Church against heresy, and the security of the throne for her son, were the ostensible motives of this coalition. But the bond between Marie and her chief supporters, the powerful Ducs de Bouillon and d'Epernon, was in reality a common hatred of Henry and a bitter jealousy of Sully, whose clear intellect and firm hand had directed with such

extraordinary sagacity the helm of state throughout Henry's long and stormy reign.

Evil influences, which displayed themselves in predictions, warnings, and prophecies, were abroad. The death of the King would at once raise Marie, as Regent for her son, to sovereign power, and throw the whole control of the State into the hands of her adherents. How far Marie was implicated in the events about to happen can never be known, and whether she listened to the dark hints of her Italian attendants, *that by the King's death alone* she could find relief. But undoubtedly the barbarous cruelty with which Concini and his wife were afterwards murdered by Henry's friends had regard to this suspicion. Whether the Duc d'Epernon knew beforehand of the conspiracy, and insured his master's death by a final thrust when he had already been struck by the assassin, or whether Henriette d'Entragues, out of revenge for the King's passion for the Princesse de Condé, herself instigated Ravaillac to the act, must ever remain a mystery.

Marie de Medici, urged by the Concini, and advised by her friend the Duc d'Epernon, was at this time unceasing in her entreaties to the King to consent to her coronation at Saint-Denis. According

to her varying mood she either wept, raved and stamped about the room, or kissed, coaxed, and cajoled him. And there was cause for her pertinacity. Henry's weak compliances with Henriette d'Entragues' pretensions, her residence in the Louvre, and her boastings of that unhappy promise of marriage, had given occasion for questions to arise touching the legitimacy of the Dauphin. Those who were politically opposed to the King would be ready, at any moment after his death, to justify rebellion on the pretence of a prior contract invalidating his present marriage.

Such an idea drove the Queen frantic. There was no peace for Henry until he consented to her coronation. Yet he was strangely reluctant to comply. An unaccountable presentiment of danger connected with that ceremony pursued him. He had never been the same since the loss of the Princesse de Condé. Now he was dull, absent, and indifferent, eat little and slept ill. Nothing interested or pleased him, save the details of his great campaign against Spain, which was about to convulse all Europe.

"Ah, my friend," said he to Sully, "how this ceremony of the coronation distresses me. Whenever I think about it I cannot shake off sinister

forebodings. Alas! I fear I shall never live to head my army. I shall die in this city of Paris. I shall never see the Princesse de Condé again. Ah, cursed coronation! I shall die while they are about it. Bassompierre tells me the maypole, which was set up in the court of the Louvre, has just fallen down. It is an evil omen."

"Well, Sire," returned Sully, "postpone the ceremony."

"No, Sully, no; it shall not be said that Henry IV. trembled before an idle prophecy. For twenty years, Sully, I have heard of predictions of my death. After all, nothing will happen to me but what is ordained."

"My God, Sire!" exclaimed Sully, "I never heard your Majesty speak so before. Countermand the coronation, I entreat you. Let the Queen not be crowned at all rather than lose your peace of mind. What does it matter? It is but a woman's whim."

"Ah, Sully, what will my wife say? I dare not approach her unless I keep my word;—her heart is so set upon being crowned."

"Let her say what she pleases, Sire; never heed her. Allow me to persuade her Majesty to postpone the ceremony."

"Try, Sully; try, if you please:—you will find what the Queen is. She will not consent to put it off."

The King spoke truly. Marie de Medici flew into a violent rage, and positively refused to listen to any postponement whatever. The coronation was fixed to take place on Thursday, the 13th of May.

It is certain that the King was distinctly warned of his approaching death. The very day and hour were marked with a cross of blood in an almanack sent to him anonymously. A period of six hours on the 14th of May was marked as fatal to him. If he survived that time, on that day—a Friday—he was safe. The day named for his death was that preceding the public entry of the Queen into Paris, after her coronation at Saint-Denis. He rose at six o'clock in the morning on that day Friday, the 14th of May. On his way down-stairs, he was met by the Duc de Vendôme, his son by Gabrielle d'Estrées. Vendôme held in his hand a paper, which he had found lying on his table. It was a horoscope, signed by an astrologer called La Brosse, warning the King that the constellation under which he was born threatened him with great danger on the 14th of May. "My father," said Vendôme, standing in his path, "do not go abroad; spend this day at home."

"La Brosse, my boy," replied Henry, looking at the paper, "is an old fox. Do you not see that he wants money? You are a young fool to mind him. My life is in the hands of God, my son,—I shall live or die as he pleases,—let me pass."

He heard mass early, and passed the day as usual. At a quarter to four o'clock in the afternoon he ordered his coach, to visit Sully, who was ailing, at the Arsenal. The streets were much crowded. Paris was full of strangers, assembled for the coronation, and to see the spectacle of the Queen's public entry. Stages and booths blocked up the thoroughfares. Henry was impatient for the arrival of his coach, and took his seat in it immediately it arrived. He signed to the Duc d'Epernon to seat himself at his right hand. De Liancourt and Mirabeau, his lords in waiting, placed themselves opposite to him. The Ducs de Lavardin, Roquelaure, and Montbazon, and the Marquis de la Force, took their places on either side. Besides these noblemen seated inside, a few guards accompanied him on horseback, but when he reached the hôtel of the Duc de Longueville, the King stopped and dismissed all his attendants, save those lords in the coach with him. From the Rue Saint-Honoré, which was greatly crowded, they entered the Rue de la Ferronnière,

on the way to the Arsenal. This was a narrow street, and numbers of wooden stalls (such as are still seen on the boulevards in Paris) were ranged along a dead wall, forming one of the sides. There was a block of carts about these booths, and the royal coach was obliged to draw up close against the dead wall. The running footmen went forward to clear the road, and the coach halted close to the wall. Ravaillac now slipped between the wall and the coach, and jumping on one of the wheels, stabbed the King twice in the breast and ribs. The knife passed through a shirt of fine cambric, richly embroidered *à jour*. A third time the assassin raised his hand to strike, but only ripped up the sleeve of the Duc de Montbazon's doublet, upon whom the King had fallen. "I am wounded," gasped Henry, "but it is nothing—" Then the Duc d'Epernon raised his royal master in his arms. Henry made a convulsive effort to speak, was choked by blood, and fell back lifeless. He was brought back dead to the Louvre. There he lay in state, clothed in his coronation robes, the crown upon his head.

The bloody almanack had told true. Henry had circled twenty times the magic chamber of life!

CHAPTER XXIX.

LOUIS XIII.

It is related that the night after the assassination of Henri Quatre by Ravaillac, and while his body lay in the Louvre, his little son, Louis XIII., screaming with terror, cried out that he saw the same men who had murdered his father coming to kill him. Louis was not to be pacified until he was carried to his mother's bed, where he passed the rest of the night.

To this infantine terror, this early association with death and murder, may be traced the strange character of Louis; weak in body and mind, timid, suspicious, melancholy, superstitious, an undutiful son, a bad husband, and an unworthy king. The fame of his great father, and the enthusiasm his memory inspired, instead of filling him with emulation, crushed and depressed him. He became a complete "*Roi fainéant.*" His reign was the reign of favourites, and nothing was heard of

the monarch but in connection with them, save that, with a superstition worthy of the Middle Ages, he formally placed France "under the protection of the Virgin."

His early favourite, Albret the Gascon, created Duc de Luynes and Constable of France, was his tyrant. As long as he lived Louis both hated and feared him. He hated his mother, he hated Richelieu, he hated his wife, Anne of Austria. Louis, surnamed "the Just," had a great capacity for hatred.

Poor Anne of Austria, to whom he was married at fifteen, she being the same age, what a lot was hers!

Her personal charms actually revolted the half-educated, awkward boy, whom all the world thought she would govern despotically. He could not help acknowledging her exceeding loveliness; but she was his superior, and he knew it. He shrank back, terrified, at her vivacity and her talents. Her innocent love of amusement jarred against his morbid nature. Melancholy himself, he disliked to see others happy, and from the day of their marriage he lived as much apart from her as state etiquette permitted.

Marie de Medici, ambitious and unprincipled as ever, widened the breach between them. She still

sat supreme in the council, and regulated public affairs. Richelieu, her favourite and minister during the Regency, in continual dread of a possible reconciliation between Louis and his wife, and in love with the young Queen himself, was rapidly rising to that dictatorship which he exercised over France and the King until he died. Both he and the Queen-mother roused Louis's jealousy against his wife, and dropped dark hints of danger to his throne, perhaps to his life. They succeeded only too well; the King and Queen became more and more estranged.

Anne of Austria uttered no complaint. She showed no anger, but her pride was deeply wounded, and amongst her ladies and her friends her joyous raillery did not spare the King. Reports of her flirtations also, as well as of her *bon mots* and her mimicry, heightened by the malice of those whose interest it was to keep them asunder, reached Louis, and alienated him more and more. Anne, too young to be fully aware of the growing danger of her position, vain of her success, and without either judicious friends or competent advisers, took no steps to reconcile herself to her husband. Coldness and estrangement rapidly grew into downright dislike and animosity; suspicions were exaggerated

into certainty, until at last she came to be treated as a conspirator and a criminal.

The age was an age of intrigue, treachery, and rebellion. The growing power of the nobles narrowed the authority of the throne. The incapacity of the King strengthened the pretensions of the princes. Spain, perpetually at war with France, sought its dismemberment by most disloyal conspiracies. Every disaffected prince or rebellious noble found a home at the Court of Philip, brother of Anne of Austria.

Thus Louis knew nothing of royalty but its cares and dangers. As a boy, browbeaten and overborne by his mother, when arrived at an age when his own sense and industry might have remedied defects of education, he took it for granted that his ignorance was incapacity, his timidity constitutional deficiency.

A prime minister was absolutely indispensable to such a monarch, and Louis at least showed some discernment in selecting for that important post the Bishop of Luçon (Cardinal Richelieu), the protégé of his mother.

Estranged from his wife, pure in morals, and correct in conduct, Louis, still a mere youth, yearned for female sympathy. A confidante was as

necessary as a minister—one as immaculate as himself, into whose ear he could, without fear of scandal, murmur the griefs and anxieties of his life. Such a woman he found in Mademoiselle de Hautefort, maid of honour to the Queen. Her modesty and her silence first attracted him. Her manners were reserved, her speech soft and gentle. She was naturally of a serious turn of mind, and had been carefully educated. She took great apparent interest in all the King said to her. Her conversation became so agreeable to him, that he dared by degrees to confide to her his loneliness, his misery, and even his bodily infirmities, which were neither few nor slight. This intimacy, to a solitary young King who longed for affection, yet delicately shrunk from the slightest semblance of intrigue, was alluring in the highest degree.

Long, however, ere Louis had favoured her with his preference she had given her whole heart to her mistress, Anne of Austria. Every word the King uttered was immediately repeated to the Queen, with such comments as caused the liveliest entertainment to that lovely princess, who treated the *liaison* as an admirable joke, and entreated her maid of honour to humour the King to the very utmost, so as to afford her the greatest possible amount of amusement.

The Court is at Compiègne. Since the days of Clotaire it has been a favourite hunting-lodge of the Kings of France. One vast façade stretches along verdant banks sloping to the river Oise, across which an ancient bridge (on which Jeanne d'Arc, fighting against the English, was taken prisoner) leads into the sunny little town. On the farther side of the château a magnificent terrace, bordered by canals, links it to the adjoining forest. So close to this terrace still press the ancient trees and woodland alleys, backed by rising hills crowned with lofty elms, and broken by deep hollows where feathery beeches wave, that even to this day the whole scene faithfully represents an ancient chase. So immense is the château that the two Queens, Marie de Medici and Anne of Austria, could each hold distinct Courts within its walls. Marie, in the suite called the "Apartments of the Queens-dowager of France," then hung with ancient tapestry and painted in fresco, looking over the grassy lawns beside the river and the town; Anne, in the stately rooms towards the forest and the woodland heights.

Within a vaulted room, the walls hung with Cordova leather stamped in patterns of gorgeous colours, Anne of Austria is seated at her toilette. Before her is a mirror, framed in lace and ribbons,

placed on a silver table. She wears a long white *peignoir* thrown over a robe of azure satin. Her luxuriant hair is unbound and falls over her shoulders; Doña Estafania, her Spanish dresser, who has never left her, assisted by Madame Bertant, combs and perfumes it, drawing out many curls and ringlets from the waving mass, which, at a little distance, the morning sunshine turns into a shower of gold. Around her stand her maids of honour, Mademoiselles de Guerchy, Saint-Mégrin, and De Hautefort. The young Queen is that charming anomaly, a Spanish *blonde*. She has large blue eyes that can languish or sparkle, entreat or command, pencilled eyebrows, and a mouth full-lipped and rosy. She has the prominent nose of her family; her complexion, of the most dazzling fairness, is heightened by rouge. She is not tall, but her royal presence, even in youth, lends height to her figure. When she smiles her face expresses nothing but innocence and candour; but she knows how to frown, and to make others frown also.

There is a stir among the attendants, and the King enters. He is assiduous in saluting her Majesty at her lever when Mademoiselle de Hautefort is present. Louis XIII. has inherited neither the rough though martial air of his father, nor the

beauty of his Italian mother. His face is long, thin, and sallow; his hair dark and scanty. He is far from tall, and very slight, and an indescribable air of melancholy pervades his whole person. As Louis approaches her, Anne is placing a diamond pendant in her ear; her hands are exquisitely white and deliciously shaped, and she loves to display them. She receives the King, who timidly advances, with sarcastic smiles and insolent coldness. While he is actually addressing her, she turns round to her lady in waiting, the Duchesse de Chevreuse, who stands behind her chair, holding a hand-mirror set in gold, and whispers in her ear and laughs, then points with her dainty finger, bright with costly rings, to the King, who stands before her. Louis blushes, waits some time for an answer, which she does not vouchsafe to give; then, greatly embarrassed, retreats into a corner near the door, and seats himself.

The Duchesse de Chevreuse, the friend and confidante of Anne of Austria, widow of the King's favourite the Duc de Luynes, now a second time Duchess, as wife of Claude Lorraine, Duc de Chevreuse, an adventuress and an *intrigante*, is a gipsy-faced, bewitching woman, dark-skinned, velvet-eyed, and enticing; her cheeks dimpling

with smiles, her black eyes dancing with mischief.

The King sits lost in thought, with an anxious and almost tearful expression, gazing fixedly at Mademoiselle de Hautefort who stands behind the Queen's chair among the maids of honour. Suddenly he becomes aware that all eyes are turned upon him. He rises quickly, and makes a sign to Mademoiselle de Hautefort to approach him; but the eyes of the maid of honour are fixed upon the ground. With a nervous glance towards the door, he reseats himself on the edge of his chair. The Queen turns towards him, then to Mademoiselle de Hautefort, and laughs, whilst the maid of honour busies herself with some lace. A moment after she advances towards the Queen, carrying the ruff in her hand which is to encircle her Majesty's neck.

Anne leans back, adjusts the ruff, and whispers to her—"Look, mademoiselle, look at your despairing lover. He longs to go away, but he cannot tear himself from you. I positively admire his courage. Go to him, *ma belle*—he is devouring you with his eyes. Have you no mercy on the anointed King of France?"

Mademoiselle de Hautefort colours, and again turns her eyes to the ground.

"Duchess," continues Anne in a low voice, addressing the Duchesse de Chevreuse, "tell mademoiselle what you would do were you adored by a great king. Would you refuse to look at him when he stands before you—red, white, smiling, almost weeping, a spectacle of what a fool even a sovereign may make of himself?" And the Queen laughs again softly, and, for an instant, mimicks the grotesque expression of the King's face.

"Madame," says Mademoiselle de Hautefort, looking up and speaking gravely, "the opinion of Madame la Duchesse would not influence me. We take different views of life. Your Majesty knows that the King is not my lover, and that I only converse with him out of the duty I owe your Majesty. I beseech you, Madame," adds she in a plaintive voice, "do not laugh at me. My task is difficult enough. I have to amuse a Sovereign who cannot be amused—to feign an interest I do not feel. Her grace the Duchesse de Chevreuse would, I doubt not, know how to turn the confidence with which his Majesty honours me to much better account;" and Mademoiselle de Hautefort glances angrily at the Duchess, who smiles scornfully, and makes her a profound curtsey.

"You say true, mademoiselle," replies she; "I

should certainly pay more respect to his Majesty's exalted position, and perhaps I should feel more sympathy for the passion I had inspired. However, you are but a mere girl, new to court life. You will learn in good time, mademoiselle—you will learn."

Mademoiselle de Hautefort, about to make a bitter reply, is interrupted by the Queen.

"Come, *petite sotte*," says Anne, still speaking under her breath, "don't lose your temper. We all worship you as the modern Diana. Venus is not at all in the line of our royal spouse. Look, he can bear it no longer; he has left the room. There he stands in the ante-room, casting one last longing look after you; I see it in the glass. Go, mademoiselle; I dismiss you—go and console his Majesty with your Platonic friendship."

Mademoiselle de Hautefort left the room, and was instantly joined by Louis, who drew her into the embrasure of an oriel window.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE ORIEL WINDOW.

"You have come at last," said Louis eagerly. "Why would you not look at me? I have suffered tortures; I abhor the Queen's ladies, a set of painted Jezebels, specially the Duchesse de Chevreuse a dangerous intriguer, her Majesty's evil genius. I saw them all mocking me. Why did you not look at me? you knew I came for you," repeated he querulously.

"Surely, Sire, I could not be so presumptuous as to imagine that a visit to her Majesty from her husband concerned me."

"Her husband! would I had never seen her, or her friend the Duchess. They are both—well, I will not say what, certainly spies, spies of Spain. My principles forbid me to associate with such women. You look displeased, mademoiselle—what have I done?"—for Mademoiselle de Hautefort showed by her expression the disapproval she felt

at his abuse of the Queen. "It is your purity, your sweetness, that alone make the Court bearable. But you are not looking at me—cruel, selfish girl! would you too forsake me?"

The maid of honour feeling that she must say something, and assume an interest she did not feel, looked up into the King's face and smiled. "I am here, Sire, for your service. I am neither cruel nor selfish, but I am grieved at the terms in which you speak of my gracious mistress. Let me pray your Majesty, most humbly, not to wound me by such language."

Her look, her manner, softened the irritable Louis. He took her hand stealthily and kissed it. He gazed at her pensively for some moments without speaking.

"How beautiful you are, and wise as you are beautiful!" exclaimed he at length. "I have much to say to you, but not about my Spanish wife. Let us not mention her." His eyes were still riveted on the maid of honour; his lips parted as if to speak, then he checked himself, but still retained her hand, which he pressed.

"You hunted yesterday, Sire," said she, confused at the King's silence and steadfast gaze; "what number of stags did you kill? I was not present

at the *curée*." She gently withdrew her hand from the King's grasp.

"I did not hunt yesterday; I was ill," replied Louis. "I am ill, very ill."

This allusion to his health instantly changed the current of his thoughts, for Louis was a complete valetudinarian. He became suddenly moody, and sank heavily into a seat placed behind a curtain, the thick folds of which concealed both him and the maid of honour.

"I am harassed, sick to death of everything. I should die but for you. I can open my heart to you." And then suddenly becoming conscious that Mademoiselle de Hautefort still stood before him, he drew a chair close to his side, on which he desired her to seat herself.

Mademoiselle de Hautefort, knowing well that the King would now go on talking to her for a long time, assumed an attitude of pleased attention. Louis looked pale and haggard. His sallow cheeks were shrunk, his large eyes hollow. As he spoke a hectic flush went and came upon his face.

"Will you not let me take your hand, mademoiselle?" said he timidly. "I feel I could talk much better if I did, and I have much to say to you."

She reluctantly placed her hand in his. The King sighed deeply.

"What is the matter, Sire?"

"Ah, that is the question! I long to tell you. I sigh because I am weary of my life. My mother, who still calls herself Regent, and pretends to govern the kingdom, quarrels perpetually with Richelieu. The council is distracted by her violence and ill-temper; affairs of state are neglected. She reproaches Richelieu publicly for his ingratitude, as she calls it, because he will not support her authority rather than the good of the kingdom. The Duc d'Epernon supports her. He is as imperious as she is. Her ambition embitters my life, as it embittered that of my great father."

"Oh, Sire, remember that the Queen-dowager of France is your mother. Besides, Richelieu owes everything to her favour. Had it not been for her he would have remained an obscure bishop at Luçon all his life. She placed him at Court."

"Yes, and he shall stay there. *Par Dieu!* he shall stay there. If any one goes it shall be my mother. I feel I myself have no capacity for governing; I shrink from the tremendous responsibility; but I am better able to undertake it than the Queen-mother. Her love of power is so excessive she

would sacrifice me and every one else to keep it—she and the Duc d'Epernon," he added bitterly. "Richelieu is an able minister. He is ambitious, I know, but I am safe in his hands. He can carry out no measures of reform, he cannot maintain the dignity of the Crown, if he is for ever interfered with by a fractious woman,—vain, capricious, incompetent."

"Oh, Sire!" and Mademoiselle de Hautefort held up her hands to stop him.

"It is true, madame. Did not the Queen-mother and her creatures, the Concini and the Duc d'Epernon, all but plunge France into civil war during her regency? She was nigh being deposed, and I with her. What a life I led until De Luynes rescued me! He presumed upon my favour, *le fripon*, and brought boat-loads of Gascon cousins to Court from Guienne. I never knew a man have so many cousins! They came in shoals, and never one of them with a silken cloak to his back—a beggarly lot!"

"But, Sire," said Mademoiselle de Hautefort, sitting upright in her chair, and trying to fix the King's wandering mind, "why do you need either her Majesty the Queen-mother or the Cardinal de Richelieu? Depend on no one. Govern for yourself, Sire."

"Impossible, impossible. I am too weak. I have no capacity. I have none of my great father's genius." And the King lifted his feathered hat reverently from his head each time he named his father. "Richelieu rules for me. He has intellect. He will maintain the honour of France. The nation is safe in his hands. As for me, I am tyrannized over by my mother, laughed at by my Spanish wife, and betrayed by my own brother. I am not fit to reign. Every one despises me—except you." And the King turned with an appealing look towards Mademoiselle de Hautefort. "You, I hope, at least, understand me. You do me justice."

There was a melting expression in the King's eyes which she had never seen before. It alarmed her. She felt that her only excuse for the treacherous part she was acting was in the perfect innocence of their relations. A visible tremor passed over her. She blushed violently, a look of pain came into her face, and her eyes fell before his gaze.

"You do not speak? Have I offended you?" cried Louis, much excited. "What have I said? Oh, mademoiselle, do not lose your sympathy for me, else I shall die! I know I am unworthy of your notice; but—see how I trust you. The

hours I spend in your society give me the only happiness I enjoy. Pity, pity the King of France, who craves your help, who implores your sympathy!"

Mademoiselle de Hautefort, speaking in her usual quiet manner, entreated him to be calm.

"Am I forgiven?" said he in a faltering voice, looking the picture of despair. "Will you still trust me?"

"Yes, yes, Sire. I am ashamed to answer such a question. Your Majesty has given me no offence."

Louis reseated himself.

"It is to prepare you for an unexpected event that I wish to talk to you. It is possible I may shortly leave Compiègne suddenly and secretly. I must tear myself away from you for a while."

"Leave the Court, Sire! What do you mean?"

"The quarrels between my mother and Richelieu are more than I can endure. They must end. One must go—I will not say which. You can guess. I am assured by Richelieu, who has information from all parts of France, that her Majesty is hated by the people. She is suspected of a knowledge of my great father's death; she has abused her position. No one feels any interest in her fate."

"But, surely, your Majesty feels no pleasure in

knowing that it is so, even if it be true, which I much doubt."

"Well, her Majesty has deserved little favour of me," replied he with indifference. "Richelieu tells me that her exile would be a popular act——"

"Her exile, Sire! You surely do not contemplate the exile of your own mother?"

"Possibly not—possibly not; but a sovereign must be advised by his ministers. It is indispensable to the prosperity of the State."

Mademoiselle de Hautefort was silent, but something of the contempt she felt might have been seen in her expressive eyes.

"I do not feel disposed," continued he, "to face the anger of the Queen-mother when she hears my determination. She would use violent language to me that might make me forget I am her son. Richelieu must break it to her. He can do it while I am away. Agitation injures my health, it deranges my digestion. I have enough to bear from my wife, from whom it is not so easy to escape——"

Again he stopped abruptly, as if he were about to say more than he intended.

Mademoiselle de Hautefort, ever on the look out for all that concerned her mistress the Queen,

glanced at him with sudden curiosity. Her eyes read his thoughts.

"Your Majesty is concealing something from me?" she said.

"Well, yes,"—and he hesitated—"it is a subject too delicate to mention."

"Have you, then, withdrawn your confidence from me, Sire?" asked she, affecting the deepest concern.

"No, no—never. I tell you everything—yet, I blush to allude to such a subject."

"What subject, Sire? Does it concern her Majesty?"

"By heaven it does!" cried the King, with unwonted excitement, a look of rage on his face. "It is said —" and he stopped, and looked round suspiciously, and became crimson. "Not here—not here," he muttered, rising. "I cannot speak of it here. It is too public. Come with me into this closet."

Mademoiselle de Hautefort, foreboding some misfortune to the Queen, followed him, trembling in every limb, into a small retiring-closet opening from the gallery where they had been seated. He drew her close to the window, glanced cautiously around, and placed his hand on her arm.

"It is said,"—he spoke in a low voice—"it is said—and appearances confirm it—that"—and he stooped, and whispered some words into Mademoiselle de Hautefort's ear, who started back with horror. "If it be so," he added coolly, "I shall crave a dispensation from the Pope, and send the Queen back to Madrid."

"For shame, Sire! you are deceived," cried Mademoiselle de Hautefort, an expression of mingled disgust, anger, and terror on her face. She could hardly bring herself to act out the part imposed upon her for the Queen's sake. She longed to overwhelm the unmanly Louis with her indignation; but she controlled her feelings. "On my honour, Sire," said she firmly, "they do but converse as friends. For the truth of this I wager my life—my salvation."

"Nothing of the kind," insisted Louis doggedly. "It is your exalted virtue that blinds you to their wickedness. My mother, who hates me—even my mother pities me; she believes in the Queen's guilt."

"Sire," broke in the maid of honour impetuously, her black eyes full of indignation, "I have already told you I will not hear my royal mistress slandered; this is a foul slander. To

me she is as sacred as your Majesty, who are an anointed king." Louis passed his hand over his brow, and mused in silence. "I beseech you, Sire, listen to me," continued she, seeing his irresolution. "I speak the truth; before God I speak the truth!" Louis looked fixedly at her. Her vehemence impressed, if it did not convince him. "Your Majesty needs not the counsel of the Queen-mother in affairs of state; do not trust her, or any one else, in matters touching the honour of your consort." And she raised her eyes, and looked boldly at him. "Promise me, Sire, to dismiss this foul tale from your mind."

"All your words are precious, mademoiselle," replied Louis evasively, and he caught her hand and kissed it with fervour.

Mademoiselle de Hautefort dared not press him further. She withdrew her hand. They were both silent, and stood opposite to each other. As Louis gazed into her eyes, still sparkling with indignation, his anger melted away.

"When I am gone, mademoiselle," said he tenderly, "do not forget me. You are my only friend. I will watch over you, though absent. Here is a piece of gold, pure and unalloyed as are my feelings towards you," and he disengaged from his

neck a medallion delicately chased. "See, I have broken it. One half I will keep; the other shall rest in your bosom;" and he pressed it to his lips, and placed it in Mademoiselle de Hautefort's hands. "As long as you hold that piece of gold without the other half, know that as the token is divided between us, so is my heart—the better half with you."

Her conscience smote her as she received this pledge. Louis had such perfect faith in her integrity, she almost repented that her duty to the Queen forced her to deceive him.

"Your Majesty overwhelms me," said she, making a deep reverence.

"The Court is full of intrigues," continued Louis. "I have no wish to control my minister; but remember this—obey no order, defy all commands, that are delivered to you without that token." The maid of honour bowed her head. A tear stole down her cheek; the King's simplicity touched her in spite of herself. "Adieu, mademoiselle," said he, "my best, my only friend. I humbly crave your pardon for aught I may have said or done to wound your delicacy. We will meet at Saint-Germain: then, perhaps, you will fear me less. We will meet at Saint-Germain."

He hesitated, and approached dangerously near to the handsome maid of honour, whose confusion made her all the more attractive. As he approached, she retreated.

Suddenly the curtain was drawn aside, and a page entered the closet, and announced—

"The Queen-dowager, who demands instant admittance to her son, the King."

Mademoiselle de Hautefort disappeared in an instant through a door concealed in the arras. The King, pale as death, put his hand to his heart, sank into a chair, and awaited the arrival of his mother.

CHAPTER XXXI.

AN OMINOUS INTERVIEW.

Louis had not long to wait, scarcely a moment passed before Marie de Medici appeared. She entered hastily; marks of violent agitation were on her countenance; her brows were knit; her eyes flashed. She was in the prime of middle life, but grown stout and unwieldy; her delicate complexion had become red and coarse, and her voice was loud and harsh; but her height, and the long habit of almost absolute command, gave her still an imposing presence. Louis involuntarily shuddered at her approach; he had been long accustomed to tremble at her frown. His first impulse was to fly by the same door through which Mademoiselle de Hautefort had vanished. He rose, however, bowed low before her, and offered her a seat.

"My son," she cried in a husky voice, walking straight up to him, "I have come to request you instantly to banish Richelieu. If you do not, I shall

return to Florence. The insolence of that villain whom I have made your minister is intolerable. He has disobeyed my express commands!"

"What has Richelieu done, Madame?"

"Is it not enough that I, your mother, who have governed France almost from your birth, should declare to you my pleasure? Would you prefer a lackey to your own mother?[1] Let it suffice that Richelieu has offended me past forgiveness. Sit down, my son"—and she seized on the terrified Louis, and almost forced him into a chair beside the table—"here are my tablets; write instantly an order that within twenty-four hours Richelieu leaves France for ever."

Louis took the tablets, but his trembling hands could not hold them. The jewelled leaves of ivory, set in gold, fell on the ground with a crash. There was a pause.

"What! Louis, you hesitate to obey me?" and the Queen's fierce eyes darted a look of fury at the King, whose slender figure positively seemed to shrink as she laid her hand upon him.

"My mother," he said, in a faltering voice, "you have told me nothing. A great minister like Richelieu cannot be dismissed on the instant."

[1] Words used by Marie de Medici to Louis XIII.

"Yes, he can, if there be another to replace him, a better than he; one who knows the respect due to the Queen-dowager of France, the widow of Henry the Great, your mother, and still Regent of the kingdom."

"But, Madame, what has Richelieu done to offend you?" and the King had the courage to meet his mother's glance unmoved.

"He has dared to disobey my positive orders. I had appointed the Duc d'Epernon governor of Poitiers. He has placed there a creature of his own. After this insult, you will understand, I can never again sit at the council with Richelieu."

"Well, Madame, and suppose you do not!" rejoined the King, whose nervous dread was rapidly giving place to resentment at his mother's arrogance. "I shall be still King of France, and Richelieu will be my minister."

"Undutiful boy!" exclaimed Marie de Medici, and she raised her hand as if to strike him; "you forget yourself."

"No, Madame, it is you who forget that, if I am your son, I am also your king. You may strike me, if you please, Madame," added he in a lower voice, "but I will not sign the exile of Richelieu." The countenance of Louis darkened

with growing passion; the threatening aspect of his mother standing before him with upraised arm, roused him to unwonted courage. "I will not exile Richelieu. I leave him to settle his differences with you and your favourites—their claims do not concern me. I will have no more *Concini*, madame; I would rather abdicate at once." And turning on his heel, without another word, or even saluting the Queen, he left the room.

A sudden dizziness, an overwhelming conviction of something new and strange in her position, sobered the passion of Marie de Medici the instant the King was gone. She stood motionless where he had left her, save that her uplifted arm dropped to her side. A mournful look—the shadow of coming misfortunes—clouded her face. Silent and dejected, the tears streaming from her eyes, she withdrew. When she had reached her own apartments, she commanded that no one should be admitted.

That same day the King left Compiègne, taking with him only two attendants. No one knew whither he was gone.

Early the next morning the Queen-mother's ladies were startled by the appearance of Cardinal Richelieu in her ante-room. It was long since he, who was wont never to be absent from her service, had been seen there.

"Tell her Majesty," he said to the Duchesse d'Epernon, "that I am come on urgent state business, by the express command of the King, and that I must speak with her in person."

After some delay he was admitted into the Queen's apartment.

Marie de Medici wears a long robe of black velvet, and a widow's coif upon her head. She looks old, worn, and anxious; she is neither imperious nor angry. She begins to realise that power is passing from her; she is intensely curious, not to say alarmed, as to what the intelligence may be, of which the Cardinal is the bearer; and she now secretly repents that she has quarrelled with him.

The Cardinal wears a close-fitting black *soutane* bound with purple, and a *beretta* of the same colour on his head; he has nothing of the churchman in his appearance. He is still a young man, upright in figure and easy in manner, attractions which he owes to his early military training. He has piercing black eyes, light brown hair that lies straight upon his forehead, and a pale, thoughtful face, already lined with wrinkles. His closely shutting mouth, thin-lipped and stern, expresses inflexible determination. His manners are composed,

almost gentle; his voice melodious. He has not yet become the imperious autocrat—the merciless butcher of the chivalrous nobles of France—of after years. Chalais and Montmorenci have not yet fallen by his order on the scaffold; and Cinq-Mars is a precocious lad, living with his mother on the banks of the Loire. Without vanity he knows that he has genius to conceive great deeds, and industry to elaborate every necessary detail. Already the consciousness of growing greatness forces itself upon him. The incompetence of the King, his indolent acquiescence in all his measures, the jealousy between Louis and his mother whom the King has hitherto not dared to check, his alienation from the young Queen his wife, open before Richelieu's mental vision a vista of almost boundless power. Now he stands in the presence of his early benefactress, the sovereign to whom he would have been faithful, had such fidelity been consistent with the welfare of France and his own ambition. Spite of habitual self-control, he is greatly moved at her forlorn condition. He still hopes that he may save her from an overwhelming calamity.

Richelieu advances to where the Queen-mother is seated beside the hearth, and after making a profound obeisance waits for her to address him.

"You bear to me a message from my son. What can he have to say to me, that he cannot speak himself?" Marie asks with dignity.

"Nothing, my most gracious mistress," replies Richelieu, almost submissively, "if your Majesty will deign to be guided by my counsel."

"You call me your mistress, Cardinal," says Marie bitterly; "but you have left my service, and you disobey my positive commands. How can I treat with such a hypocrite?"

"Madame, I beseech you, let not personal animosity towards myself—be I innocent or guilty of what you accuse me—blind you to the danger in which you now stand."

"Danger! What do you mean? To what danger do you allude?"

"The danger that threatens you, Madame, in the displeasure of his Majesty."

"Ah, I perceive. My son strikes through you, my creature, that he may crush me. I congratulate your eminence on your triumphant ingratitude."

"Madame," and the Cardinal wrings his hands and advances a step or two nearer the Queen with an air of earnest entreaty, "hear me, I implore you. Let us not lose precious time in mere words.

I have come here in a twofold character, as your friend and as minister of state. Permit me first to address you as the former, Madame, your counsellor and your sincere friend." As he speaks his voice trembles, his manner is almost humble as he seeks to allay the stormy passions that gather on the brow of his royal mistress.

Marie de Medici is so much taken aback at this unusual display of feeling in the stern Cardinal, that though her eyes glisten with anger she makes no reply.

"Your Majesty, in honour and greatness," continues Richelieu, "stands next to the throne. Be satisfied, Madame, with the second place in the kingdom. Your own age, Madame"—Marie starts—"and the increased experience of his Majesty, justify you in committing the reins of government into his hands and into the hands of such ministers as he may appoint."

"Yourself, for instance," breaks in Marie bitterly.

"Madame, I implore you, by the respect and the affection I bear you, not to interrupt me. Withdraw, graciously and cheerfully, from all interference with state affairs. Resign your place at the council. Dismiss those nobles who, by

their rebellious conduct, excite his Majesty's displeasure, specially the Duc d'Epernon."

"Never!" exclaims Marie passionately. "I will not resign my place at the council, nor will I sacrifice my supporter, the Duc d'Epernon. My son is incapable of governing. He has ever been the tool of those about him. I am his best substitute. This is a miserable plot by which you basely seek to disgrace me by my own act—to rise by my fall."

"Oh, Madame, to whom I owe so much," pleads Richelieu, "whom I would now serve while I can, hear me. I speak from my heart—I speak for the last time. Be warned, I beseech you." His hands are still clasped, his voice falters, tears flow down his cheeks. Any one less obstinately blind than the Queen would have been warned by the evidence of such unusual emotion in a man ordinarily so cold and impassible as the Cardinal.

"Ha, ha, you are an admirable actor, Cardinal!" cries she. "But what if I refuse to listen to a traitor? Who named me[1] 'Mother of the kingdom?' Who vowed to me 'that the purple with which I invested him would be a solemn pledge of his willingness to shed his blood

[1] Richelieu used these precise words in speaking of Marie de Medici.

in my service?' I know you, Armand de Plessis."

For some minutes neither utters a word. When he addresses the Queen again, Richelieu has mastered his feelings and speaks with calmness, but his looks express the profoundest pity.

"I am no traitor, Madame, but the unwilling bearer of a decision that will infinitely pain you, if you drive me to announce it. But if you will condescend to listen to my counsel, to conciliate your son the King, and disarm his wrath by immediate submission, then that terrible decision never need be revealed. That you should be wise in time, Madame," adds he, in a voice full of gentleness, contemplating her with the utmost compassion, "is my earnest prayer."

Before he had done speaking the Cardinal sinks on his knees at her feet, and draws forth from his breast a paper, to which are appended the royal seals. Marie, whose usual insolence and noisy wrath have given place to secret fear, still clings to the hope that she is too powerful to be dispensed with, and that by a dauntless bearing she will intimidate Richelieu, and, through him, the King, replies coldly—

"I have given you my answer. Now you can

withdraw." Then, rising from her chair, she turns her back upon Richelieu—who still kneels before her—and moves forward to leave the room.

"Stay, Madame!" cries Richelieu, rising, stung to the quick by her arrogant rejection of his sympathy, and ashamed of the unwonted emotion the forlorn position of his royal mistress had called forth; "stay, and listen to this decree, in the name of his Majesty." And he unfolds the parchment. "Once more, Madame, understand. Unless you will on the instant resign your seat in the Council of State and dismiss the Duc d'Epernon—a man suspected of a hideous crime, which you at least, Madame, ought never to have forgotten—from his attendance on your person, I am commanded by his Majesty——"

"Dismiss d'Epernon!—my only trusty servant, d'Epernon, who has defended me from your treachery!"—breaks in Marie passionately, her voice rising higher at every word—"Never—never! Let me die first! How dare you, Cardinal Richelieu, come hither to affront the mother of your King? I will NOT dismiss the Duc d'Epernon. It is you who shall be dismissed"—and she glares upon him with fury—"despised, dishonoured, blasted, as you deserve."

"If you refuse, Madame—and let me implore you to reflect well before you do," continues the Cardinal, quite unmoved by her reproaches—"I have his Majesty's commands to banish you from Court, and to imprison you during his pleasure within this palace."[1]

No sooner has he uttered these words than the Queen, who stands facing the Cardinal, staggers backwards. A deadly pallor overspreads her face. She totters, tries to grasp the arm of the chair from which she has risen, and before Richelieu, who watches her agony with eyes rather of sorrow than of anger, can catch her, she has fallen fainting on the floor.

At his cries the Queen's ladies appear. He leaves her to their care, and proceeds to the apartments of Anne of Austria, whom, through Madame de Chevreuse, he informs of what has occurred.

Anne of Austria on hearing that the Queen-mother was disgraced, saw in her unfortunate mother-in-law, who had never ceased to persecute her and to arouse the jealousy of the King, only an unhappy parent. She flew to her, threw herself into her arms, and readily promised to employ all the influence she possessed to mitigate the royal wrath.

[1] See note 21.

CHAPTER XXXII.

LOVE AND TREASON.

ANNE OF AUSTRIA has left Compiègne, and the royal prisoner and is now at Saint-Germain. The château stands upon the crest of a hill, backed by a glorious forest that darkens the heights encircling Paris.

It is spring; the air is warm and genial, the sky mildly blue; light clouds temper the bright sunshine that plays upon the southern façade of the palace, and glistens among the elms which form magnificent avenues in the surrounding park.

The King has not yet returned, and the Queen and her ladies, relieved of his dreary presence, revel in unusual freedom. Concerts, suppers, dances, repasts in the forest, and moonlight walks on the terrace, are their favourite diversions. Anne of Austria has not positively forgotten the lonely captive at Compiègne, but is too much engrossed with her own affairs to remember more than her promise to assist her. That atmosphere of flattery a woman

loves so well and accepts as an offering exacted by her beauty breathes around her. Monsieur Gaston, Duc d'Orléans, the King's only brother, is always by her side. Monsieur is gay, polished, gallant; tall and slight like his brother, and pale-faced, but not, as with Louis, with the pallor of disease. He has much of his mother's versatile nature without her violent temper. Like her he is fickle, weak, and treacherous, incapable of any deep or stable feeling. Monsieur talks to the Queen of Madrid, and sympathizes with her attachment to her brother, to whom Anne writes almost daily long letters in cipher (always committed to the care of the Duchesse de Chevreuse), notwithstanding the war between France and Spain. The chivalrous Duc de Montmorenci, more formal and reserved than Monsieur, but equally devoted; the Duc de Bellegarde, no longer the ideal of manly beauty dear to the heart of poor Gabrielle d'Estrées, but grey-headed and middle-aged, though still an ardent servant of the fair, with the chivalric manners and soldier-like freedom of the former reign; gallant, rough, generous Bassompierre, who was to pay so dearly by twelve years' imprisonment in the Bastille his opposition to the Cardinal; and Maréchal d'Ornano, the *beau sabreur* of that day,

were also in attendance, each one the object of the King's morbid jealousy.

Mademoiselle de Hautefort rarely leaves the Queen. She rejoices almost more than her mistress in the King's absence. The Duchesse de Chevreuse, bewitching and spiteful, closely attended by the Comtes Chalais and Louvigni, whom she plays one against the other; the Duchesse de Montbazon, her step-mother, whose imperious eyes demand worship from all who approach her, ever in the company of De Rancé,[1]—by-and-by to found the order of La Trappe,—are some of the ladies who form the Queen's Court.

One moonlit night the Queen and her ladies had lingered late on the stately terrace, built by Henry IV., which borders the forest and extends for two miles along the edge of the heights on which the château stands. The Queen and her brother-in-law, Monsieur Duc d'Orléans, have seated themselves somewhat apart from the rest on the stone balustrade that fronts the steep descent into the plains round Paris. Vineyards line the hill-side, which falls rapidly towards the Seine flowing far beneath, its swelling banks rich with groves, orchards, villas, and gardens. Beyond, the

[1] See note 22.

plains lay calm and still, wrapped in dark shadows, save where the moonbeams fall in patches and glints of silvery light. Of the great city which spreads itself beyond, not a vestige is to be seen. All human lights are extinguished, but the moon rides high in the heavens in fields of azure brightness, and the stars shine over the topmost heights, where, on the very verge of the horizon, and facing the terrace, the towers of the Cathedral of Saint-Denis break the dusky sky-line.

A range of hills links this far-off distance with the sombre masses of the adjoining forest. Great masses of trees surge up black in front, swaying hither and thither in the night breeze; the rustling of their leaves is the only sound that breaks the silence. For a time the Queen sits motionless.

"What a lovely night," she says at last, as she casts her eyes out over the broad expanse of earth and sky. "Oh that the world could be ever as calm and peaceful!"

A sad look comes into her eyes,—she heaves a deep sigh, throws back her head and gazes upwards. The softened rays of the moon shine upon her face, light up the masses of her golden hair, and play among the folds of a long white robe which encircles her to the feet. She sits

framed, as it were, in a circle of supernatural lustre. Monsieur is beside her, rapt in admiration. The beautiful vision before him intoxicates his senses. The landmarks of social restriction, of tyrannous etiquette, have vanished, gone, with the sun and the daylight. He forgets that she is a great queen, the wife of his brother—his Sovereign; he forgets that their attendants, though invisible, are at hand, that a glittering palace lies hid among the woods, with its attendant multitudes; he forgets all save that she is there before him, a dazzling presence, sprung, as it seems, out of the darkness of the night. He gazes at her with speechless rapture. Words which had often before trembled on his lips must now be uttered. He is about to speak, when the Queen, unconscious of what is passing within him, awakes from her reverie and points to the forest.

"See, Gaston, how the moon plays upon those branches. I could almost believe that some fantastic shapes are gliding amongst the trees. Let us go back; the forest is horribly dark, it frightens me." And she shudders.

"I can see nothing but you, my sister," answers Monsieur softly. "You are the very goddess of the night." And his eyes rest on her with an impassioned gaze.

Anne of Austria still looks fixedly into the thicket, as if fascinated by the mystery of the great woods. Again she shudders and wraps the light mantle she wore closer around her.

"It is late, my brother," she says, rising. "If I stay longer I shall have evil dreams. Let us go."

"Oh, my sister! oh, Anne!" cries the Duke, "let us stay here for ever." And he caught one of the folds of her white robe, kissed it, and gently endeavoured to draw her, again, toward the balustrade.

"By no means," replies the Queen, startled, for the first time meeting his eyes. "Ah, my brother," adds she, becoming suddenly much confused, "are you sure you do not frighten me more than the strange shapes among the trees?"

"Trust me," cries Monsieur ardently, retaining her robe almost by force. "Tell me you will trust me—now, always. Ah, my sister, my heart bleeds for you. Never, never will you find one so devoted to you as I——"

There was a certain eloquence in his words, a truth in his protestings, that seemed to touch her. Anne flushes from head to foot.

"Monsieur—Gaston—let me go." And she disengages herself with difficulty. Monsieur now rose.

"Where is the Duchesse de Chevreuse?" asks Anne, not knowing what to say.

"No fear for her: she is well attended," replies Monsieur in a voice full of vexation. "Every one is in good luck but me. I never saw a man so madly in love as poor Chalais, and the Duchess returns it."

The Queen is now walking onwards, at as rapid a pace as the uncertain light permitted, along the terrace. Monsieur follows her.

"Yes—in love,"—and Anne laughs her silvery laugh; "but that is not the way I would give my heart if I gave it at all, which I don't think I am tempted to do." And she looked back archly at Monsieur, whose countenance fell. "Chalais is one among so many," continues the Queen, trying to resume her usual manner. "The Duchess is very benevolent."

"Alas, my poor Henry!" answers Monsieur, "with him it is an overwhelming passion. Louvigni and the others admire and court the Duchess; but they are not like Chalais—he worships her. The Duchess is a coquette who uses him for her own purposes. She is now inciting him to head a dangerous conspiracy against the Cardinal. Chalais has opened the matter to me; but they go far—dan-

gerously far. I cannot pledge myself to them as yet."

"Oh, Gaston!" exclaims the Queen, stopping, and laying her hand eagerly on his arm; "if you love me as you say you do, join in any conspiracy against the Cardinal."

The Queen speaks with vehemence. A sudden fire shot into her eyes, as she turns towards Monsieur. Her delicate hand still rests for an instant upon him, and is then withdrawn.

"Fair sister," replies the Duke, "you cannot pretend to misunderstand me. For your service I would risk anything—how much more a tussle with an arrogant minister, who has outraged me—as much as he has you. Perhaps, Anne, I would risk too much for your sake." And the enamoured look again comes into his eyes. But the Queen draws back, and turns her head away. "Deign to command me, sister—Queen," he adds, "only to command me, and I will obey."

Anne is now walking onwards. For a few moments she does not reply.

"If you would serve me—let Richelieu be banished," says she at last imperiously. "I care not whither. Nothing is too bad for him. He has dared to insult me. You, Gaston, are safe,

even if you fail. My brother will receive you at Madrid; I will take care of that."

"I am overcome by your gracious consideration for my welfare," cries Monsieur, catching at her words. "But, my sister," continues he gravely, "do you know what this plot means? Assassination is spoken of. At this very moment I wager my life the Duchess is employing all her seductions to draw Chalais into a promise of stabbing the Cardinal."

"Stabbing the Cardinal? Impossible! Chalais would not commit a crime. You make me tremble. The Duchess told me nothing of this. She must have lost her head."

"I know that Chalais is fiercely jealous. He is jealous of every one who approaches the Duchess, and we all know that the Cardinal is not insensible to her charms——"

"Odious hypocrite!" breaks in the Queen.

"As long as Richelieu lives," continues Monsieur, "my mother will not be set at liberty. He dreads her influence. He knows she has a powerful party."

"It is infamous!" exclaims Anne of Austria.

"The Cardinal persuades the King that he alone can govern France, and that our mother desires

to depose him and appoint a regency, which I am to share with her; that you, my sister, conspire against him with Spain. My brother, weak, irresolute, insensible to you, believes all that is told him. I, my mother's only friend, dare not assist her. You, his wife, the loveliest princess in Europe—nay, in the whole world,"—and his kindling eyes fix themselves upon her—"he repulses. You might as well be married to an anchorite. Thank God, his Majesty's health is feeble, his life very uncertain. If he dies I shall be King of France, and then——" He pauses, as if hesitating to finish the sentence. "Ah, my sister!" he exclaims, stopping and trying to detain her. "Had I been blessed with such a consort I would have passed my life at her feet. Would that even now I might do so! The dark canopy of these ancient trees—the silence, the solitude, make all possible. Speak to me, Anne; tell me—oh, tell me that I may hope. Do not turn away from me——"

The Queen had stopped. She stands listening to him with her face turned towards the ground.

The moon is fast sinking behind the distant tree-tops, and the deepest shadows of the night darken their path which had now left the

terrace, and lay beneath the trees. The wind sighs and moans in the adjoining forest, and an owl hoots from an ivy-covered tree. For some minutes the Queen moves not. Her whole figure is in shadow. Was she listening to the voices of the night? or was she deeply musing on what she had heard? Who can tell?

Some sudden resolve seemed, however, to form itself in her mind. She roused herself, and motions to Monsieur with her hand to go onwards. "Alas, my brother," she says with a deep sigh, "do not press me, I beseech you. You know not what you say. Such words are treason." And she hurries onwards into the gloom. "Head the conspiracy against the Cardinal," she continues, moving quickly forward as if afraid to hear more; "restrain the violence of Chalais, who loves you well and will obey you. I will temper the indiscretion of the Duchess. She is an excellent lieutenant, inspired in her readiness of resource and ingenuity in intrigue; but—she is a bad general. We must be careful, Gaston, or we shall all find ourselves prisoners in the Bastille."

"No, by Saint Paul! not so, my sister," and Monsieur laughs gaily, for his facile nature dwelt upon nothing long, and his thoughts had now been diverted into other channels. "No; but we will

have Richelieu there! Bassompierre and d'Ornano are with us; they swear that they will shut him up in an iron cage—as Louis XI. did Cardinal Balue—for life, and feed him on bread and water. *Corps de Dieu!* I should like to see it."

"But I will have no blood shed," rejoins the Queen; "remember that."

"My sister, your word is law. When I have learnt more from Chalais, I will inform you of every detail."

They had now reached the château. The windows shone with light. Torches fixed in the ground burnt round the great quadrangle, and a guard of musketeers, assembled near the entrance, presented arms as the Queen passed.

A page appeared, and handed a dispatch to Mademoiselle de Mérigny, who had now joined the Queen. She presented it to her Majesty. Anne broke the seals. As she read she coloured, then laughed. "Gaston," whispered she, turning to Monsieur, "this is the most extraordinary coincidence. We have been talking of the Cardinal, and here is a letter from him in which he craves a private audience. You shall learn by-and-by what it means."

"*Par Dieu!*" exclaimed Monsieur, full of wonder.

"Tell no one of this but Chalais," again whispered the Queen. Then she lightly laid her small hand within that of Monsieur; they mounted the grand staircase together, and passed through the long suite of the royal apartments. All were blazing with light; on either side of the great gallery stood the Court, ranged in two lines, waiting her Majesty's pleasure. As she passed, led by Monsieur, she bowed slightly, and, with a wave of the hand, dismissed the assembly. At the door leading to her private apartment Monsieur pressed her hand, raised it to his lips, and, glancing at her significantly, bowed and retired.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE CARDINAL DUPED.

ANNE OF AUSTRIA seated herself beside a fire which burnt on the hearth. She signed to her attendants to withdraw.

"Send hither to me the Duchesse de Chevreuse, if she has returned to the château," said she to one of the pages in waiting. Then Anne drew from her bosom the letter she had just received. "It is incredible," said she, speaking to herself, "that he should so compromise himself! Pride has turned his brain. Now it is my turn, Monsieur le Cardinal." The Duchess entered hastily. "Read, *ma belle*, read," cried Anne, holding out the dispatch to her, "the fates favour us. Let us lay a trap for this wicked prelate."

"*Ma foi*," replied the Duchess, after having re-perused the letter contained in the dispatch, "even I could not have contrived it better. Here is the

Cardinal craving a private audience of your Majesty in the absence of the King. It will be a declaration in form—such as he made to me."

"A declaration to me, Duchess? He would not dare——"

"Madame, he has been a soldier, and has passed his life along with a great queen. He believes himself irresistible. Who knows if Marie de Medici did not tell him so?" Anne of Austria looked displeased. "Pardon me, Madame, this saucy Cardinal, whom I call the *Court-knave*, makes me forget myself. Your Majesty must receive him graciously."

"Yes, he shall come," cried Anne; "he shall come and pay for his audacity, the hypocrite! But tell me, Duchess, tell me instantly, how can I best revenge myself? I have a long account to settle. Shall I command my valets, Laporte and Putange, to hide behind the arras and beat him until he is half dead?"

"No, Madame, that would be too dangerous; he might cut your head off in revenge, *à la reine Anne Boleyn.* We must mortify him—wound his vanity: no vengeance equal to that with a man like the Cardinal. He is intensely conceited, and proud of his figure. He imagines that he is graceful and alluring—perhaps he has been told so by her

Majesty—I beg your pardon, Madame"—and the Duchess stopped and pursed up her lips, as if she could say more but dared not.

"Did Marion de l'Orme betray him?" asked the Queen slily, "or do you speak on your own knowledge?"

"I have it!" cried Madame de Chevreuse—not noticing the Queen's question—and her mischievous eyes danced with glee. "I will meet him when he comes to-morrow, and persuade him to appear in the dress of a Spaniard, out of compliment to you. Stay, he shall dance, too, and we will provide a mandoline to accompany his voice. I will tell him that you have long admired him in secret, and that if he appears in so becoming a costume he is sure to be well received. A Spanish costume, too, for he knows how you adore Spain, the spy—then he shall dance a *sarabande*, a *bolero à l'Espagnol*, or sing——"

"Ha! ha! Duchess, you are *impayable*," and the Queen laughed until the tears ran down her cheeks. "But will he be fool enough to believe you? If he does, I will kill him with scorn, the daring Cardinal!" and Anne of Austria drew herself up, looked into a mirror opposite, shook her golden curls, and laughed again.

The next morning, at the hour of the Queen's lever, the Cardinal arrived. The Duchesse de Chevreuse met him and conducted him to a room near the Queen's saloon. She carefully closed the door, begged him to be seated, and, with an air of great mystery, requested him to listen to her before his arrival was announced to her Majesty. The Cardinal was greatly taken aback at finding himself alone with the Duchess. She looked so seductive; the dark tints of her luxuriant hair, hanging about her neck and shoulders, harmonized so well with her *brunette* complexion, her brown eyes bent smilingly upon him, her delicate robe clinging to her tall figure, that he was almost tempted to repent his infidelity to her, and that he had come for any other than for her.

"Your eminence is surprised to see me," said she, smiling, and speaking in the softest voice, and with the utmost apparent frankness, "but I am not in the least jealous," and she shook her finger at him.

The Cardinal reddened, and looked confused.

"Do you, then, Duchess, guess on what errand I have come?"

"Perfectly, perfectly; when I heard you had requested a private audience in the absence of the King, I understood the rest."

"Perhaps I have been indiscreet," said Richelieu, and he sighed, "but I was anxious to explain my position to the Queen. I fear that she misconceives me; that she looks on me as her enemy; that she imagines that I prejudice the King against her. I desire to explain my feelings to her; they are of a mixed nature."

"So I should suppose," answered Madame de Chevreuse primly, almost bursting with suppressed laughter.

"Do you think, then, madame, that her Majesty might be induced to lay aside her silence, her reserve? Are you authorised to admit me to her presence?"

"I am, Cardinal."

Richelieu's face flushed deep, his eyes glistened.

"To a certain extent," continued the Duchess, "the Queen is gratified by your homage. Her Majesty has noted your slim yet manly form, your expressive eyes. She admires your great talents."

"Do I dream?" exclaimed Richelieu. "You, madame, are indeed magnanimous. I feared that you might be indignant at what you might consider my inconstancy."

"No, Cardinal, you could not be inconstant, for you were never loved."

Richelieu started.

"By me—I mean to say, your eminence. You really should spare me," added she affectedly; "but I suppose I must speak. Anne of Austria, the daughter of a hundred kings, the wife of your Sovereign, secretly loves you, monseigneur. It is astonishing your extraordinary penetration never discovered this before. Since you went into the Church you must have grown modest; but love is blind, says the motto," and the Duchess was obliged to hold her handkerchief to her face to hide her laughter.

"What words of ecstasy do you utter, adorable Duchess! But you must be aware of the coldness, the insulting scorn which the lovely Queen has hitherto shown towards me. How could I venture to guess——?"

"Ah, Cardinal, it is easy to see you are not so advanced in the art of love as of politics. Let me advise you to read Ovid—a little of 'The Art of Love'—*pour vous remettre.* Did you learn so little, then, from her late Majesty, Marie de Medici, as not to know that where most Cupid triumphs he most conceals his wicked little person? That very coldness and scorn you speak of are but proofs of the Queen's passion. But let me tell you one

thing: the Queen fears you may deceive—betray her; and you must excuse her in this, when you remember, monseigneur, certain tales of treachery —all utterly false, of course—but then pardon a woman's fears. You must, to speak plainly, give her some undoubted proof of your love."

"Madame, you cannot doubt after what I have just heard that I can hesitate in promising to do all and everything my royal mistress can desire."

The Duchess confessed afterwards to the Queen, that it was with the utmost difficulty she could keep her countenance, so absolutely farcical were his transports.

"Have a care what you promise," said the Duchess to the Cardinal; "the Queen is very *bizarre*, and perhaps may require something impracticable."

"Madame," replied Richelieu, "to *me* nothing in this realm is impracticable; speak only her Majesty's wishes, and I hasten to obey them."

"Well, then, to-night you must come at dusk to her apartments." The Cardinal bounded from his chair with delight. "To-night; but not in this sombre, melancholy dress; you must wear a toilette a little *convenable* to the part you hope to act—something brilliant, gaudy—*un pantalon vert*,

par exemple." The Cardinal started. "At your knees little bells must be fastened. You must have a velvet jacket, scarlet scarf, and, in fact, all the *et cæteras* of a Spanish dress. It will please the Queen, and pay her a delicate compliment, to which, believe me, she will not be insensible."

All this time Richelieu had listened to the Duchess in an agony of surprise and amazement. "But, madame," said he, at length, "this is impossible. I, a dignitary of the Church, a Cardinal. Much as I desire to show my devotion to the Queen, she herself cannot expect from me so strange, so extraordinary a proof——"

"Certainly, monseigneur, it is an extreme proof of your devotion, and as such the Queen will regard it. She will be gratified and at the same time will be thoroughly convinced of your sincerity. However, pray do as you please," and the Duchess shrugged her shoulders; "I merely mention her Majesty's wishes; you are quite at liberty to refuse. I shall therefore," and she rose, "report your refusal."

"Stop, Duchess, stop, I entreat you!" interrupted Richelieu, "you are so precipitate! I will —I must! (But what a fearful degradation! I, the prime minister of France, a prince of the

Church, to appear in the disguise of a mountebank!) Ah, madame, her Majesty is too hard on me; but I adore, I worship her too much to refuse. Yes,—her wishes are my law; I cannot, I dare not refuse. Tell the Queen, at twilight this evening, I will present myself in her apartments."

The Duchess waited no longer, but flew to acquaint the Queen with her success. Neither could for a long time articulate a single syllable, they were so overcome with laughter. Music was introduced behind the arras, for the Cardinal was to be prevailed on to dance a *sarabande*. Then they impatiently awaited the moment of his arrival. At last, enveloped in a Spanish cloak that entirely concealed his dress, the Cardinal entered. He was hastily rushing towards the Queen—Heaven only knows with what intentions —when Madame de Chevreuse interposed:

"Not yet, Cardinal—not yet; you must show us your dress first, then you must dance a *sarabande*, *a bolero* — something. Her Majesty has heard of your accomplishments and insists on it."

"Yes," cried Anne of Austria, "I insist on it, monseigneur, and have provided the music accordingly."

The violins now struck up. Richelieu looked

confounded. He was almost on the point of rushing out, when a few words whispered to him by the Duchess arrested him; they acted like a charm. Casting one deep, impassioned glance at the Queen, who sat at a little distance reposing on a couch, ravishing in beauty, her rosy lips swelling with ill-suppressed scorn, he threw down his cloak, displaying his extraordinary dress, bells, scarlet scarf and all, and began to dance—yes, to dance!

Poor man! he was no longer young, and was stiff from want of practice; so after a few clumsy *entrechats* and *pirouettes*, he stopped. He was quite red in the face and out of breath. He looked horribly savage for a few moments. The music stopped also, and there was a pause. Then he advanced towards the Queen, the little bells tinkling as he moved.

"Your Majesty must *now* be convinced of my devotion. Deign, most adorable Princess, to permit me to kiss that exquisite hand."

The Queen listened to him in solemn silence. The Duchess leaned behind her couch, a smile of gratified malice on her face. The Cardinal, motionless before them, awaited her reply. Then Anne of Austria rose, and, looking him full in the face, measured him from head to foot. Anger, contempt,

and scorn flashed in her eyes. At last she spoke —ineffable disgust and disdain in her tone— "Your eminence is, I rejoice to see, good for something better than a *spy*. I had hitherto doubted it. You have diverted me immensely. But take my advice; when you next feel inclined to pay your addresses to the Queen of France, get yourself shut up by your friends for an old fool. Now you may go."

Richelieu, who had gradually turned livid while the Queen spoke, waited to hear no more. He covered himself with his cloak and rushed headlong from the room.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE MAID OF HONOUR.

The King returns to Saint-Germain as suddenly as he had departed; he commands a hunt in the forest at noon. The château wears an air of unusual gaiety. The King and Queen start together from the quadrangle, but they do not address each other. Anne, who rides on in front, attended by Monsieur, is positively dazzling in her sunny beauty. Her delicate cheeks are flushed with excitement. A small velvet cap, with a heron's plume, rests on her head, and an emerald-coloured riding-dress, bordered with gold, sets off her rounded figure. She is followed by her ladies, many of whom wear masks to protect their complexions. The maids of honour are in blue, with large hats overtopped by enormous feathers.

Near them rides the King. He is much too shy to address Mademoiselle de Hautefort before such an assemblage; but his eyes constantly follow

her, and he is infinitely gratified by the reserve of her manner towards the young gallants of the Court. Behind him rides the Grand Falconer, followed by the huntsmen, the *piqueur*, the whippers-in, and the falcons, hooded and chained to the wrists of their bearers. Last come the dogs —the sad King's special favourites. The brilliant cavalcade flashes among the glades, which intersect the forest in every direction. The gaily caparisoned steeds, and their still gayer riders, the feathers, the lace, the embroidery, flutter in and out among the openings of the wood, and are lost in the many paths, where every turn is so like the other, yet each marked by some special beauty. Most of the ladies are mounted on palfreys, but some prefer litters; others are drawn up and down in cumbrous coaches, that threaten each moment to overturn on the gnarled roots of beech and oak that break the sward. On the riders dash between the giant tree-trunks, unhidden by the luxuriant foliage that masses the woods in summer —for the season is spring—and the trees are covered with but a slight shade of green leaves just bursting from the grey boughs. Yonder they dart under a pine-tree that darkens the ground, its spiky branches casting forth an aromatic perfume.

Then beneath a cherry-tree, white with snowy blossoms, on among a maze of goss and yellow broom that streak the underwood with fire.

The birds sing in the bushes, the bees buzz among the blossoms, and the horses' hoofs crush the tender mosses and the early flowers that carpet the ground. At the approach of the hunters hares and rabbits run lightly away, and timid does, with their young at their side, scamper far into the deepest recesses of the woods. Now the bugles sound, the dogs bay loudly; they spread themselves from side to side and disappear among the coppice, and the whole glittering company, gilded coaches, litters and all follow them, and dash out of sight and are hidden among the trees.

It was arranged that the hunt should lead towards a noble mansion lying on the confines of the forest, in the direction of Bondy, where the host, apprized of the intended honour, had prepared an ample collation.

Etiquette demanded that the King and Queen should be served apart from the rest. After their repast was finished and their attendants had withdrawn, the Queen approached nearer to the King. He started up and turned towards the door. Anne followed him. The long ride in the forest had flushed

her cheeks. She looked brilliant. "Your Majesty will not refuse to speak to me, surely," said she in the softest tones of her naturally sweet voice, and she raised her glorious eyes, which would have melted any other man but Louis, beseechingly.

The King shook his head sullenly.

"What have I done that your Majesty should scorn me?" said she, stretching out her beautiful hand with the most winning gesture to detain him.

Louis shrank from her touch, and turned his back upon her.

"Sire, will you not at least hear me, as you would hear the least of your subjects?" and the Queen's eyes filled with tears and her hand dropped to her side.

"What have you to say to me?" asked Louis harshly, not looking at her.

"When I last saw your Majesty at Compiègne," replied she with a faltering voice, "your mother, the Queen-dowager" — at her name Louis shuddered—"was mistress of the palace and of France. She sat at the royal board; she presided at the Council of State; your Majesty obeyed and loved her as a son. She is now a prisoner—disgraced, forsaken, ill." The Queen's voice became so un-

steady that she was obliged to stop, and unbidden tears rolled down her cheeks. "What has this great Queen done to deserve your Majesty's displeasure?" she added after a pause.

"Madame, it is no affair of yours," answered Louis gruffly. "I refuse to give you my reasons. I act according to the advice of my council. Do not detain me," and he turned again to leave the room. Anne placed herself in front of him; her head was thrown back, her figure raised to its full height, the tears on her eyelids were dried; she was no longer timid, but exasperated.

"If I have ventured to intercede for the Queen-mother," said she with dignity, "it is because she implored me to do so. She wept upon my bosom. Her heart was all but broken. I comforted her as a daughter. I promised her to use such feeble powers as I had, to soften your heart, Sire. It is a sacred pledge I am discharging."

"You are a couple of hypocrites!" exclaimed Louis with great irritation, facing round upon her. "You hate each other. From my mother I have freed myself; but you"—and he surveyed her savagely from head to foot—"you, Madame Anne of Austria, you remain."

"Yes, I remain," returned Anne, "until, as I am

told, you crave a dispensation from the Pope and send me back to Madrid." These last words were spoken slowly and with marked emphasis. "I am a childless queen," and she shot a bitter glance at Louis, who now stood rooted to the spot and listened to her with an expression of speechless amazement.

"Who told you, Madame, that I sought a dispensation from the Pope, and to send you back to Madrid?" asked Louis sharply. Then, without waiting for an answer he put his hand to his forehead as if some sudden thought had struck him, knit his brows, and was lost in thought.

"I have heard so, no matter how," answered the Queen coolly, "and on excellent authority. Sire," she cried passionately, no longer able to restrain her feelings, "you use me too ill—rather than suffer as I do I will leave France for ever; I will not bear the mockery of being called your wife—I would rather bury myself in a convent at Madrid."

Louis was so completely abstracted, that although he had asked her a question, he had forgotten to listen to her reply. Now he caught at her last word.

"Madrid? Yes, madame, I believe it. Your heart is there. I know it but too well. Would you had never left Madrid! Ever since you came into France

you have desired my death that you might wed a comelier consort."

Louis could scarcely articulate, so violently was he excited. Anne did not stir, only her glowing eyes followed, as it were, each word he uttered.

"You talk of the Queen-mother, do you know that she warned me long ago that you were dishonouring me?"

"Oh, Sire, if you forget who I am," exclaimed the Queen, "remember at least that I am a woman!" and she burst into tears, and for a few moments sobbed bitterly.

"Can you deny it, Madame," continued the King, with rising fury, his mouth twitching nervously, as was his wont when much agitated—"can you deny it? Am I not become a jest among my own courtiers? You, the Queen of France, openly encourage the addresses of many lovers. You are wanting, Madame, even in the decency of the reserve becoming your high station," and Louis clenched his fist with rage.

"I deny what you say," returned the Queen boldly; "I have discoursed with no man to the dishonour of your Majesty." She was trembling violently, but she spoke firmly and with dignity.

"If I am wanting in concealment," added she, "it is because I have nothing to conceal."

"I do not believe you," answered the King rudely.

"No, Sire, you do not, because you are my enemy. Your mind is poisoned against me. You encourage the lies of Richelieu, you slander me to my own attendants. Worse than all, you dare to couple my name with that of the Duc d'Orléans, your own brother. It is a gross calumny."

Her voice rose as she spoke; the power of truth and innocence was in her look—it was impossible not to believe her. For an instant the King's suspicions seemed shaken. He followed eagerly every word she uttered; but at the name of Monsieur a livid paleness overspread his face; for a moment he looked as if he would have swooned. Then recovering himself somewhat he came close up to her, and with a wild look he scanned her curiously, as though to read some answer to his suspicions. "Who can have told her? who can have told her?" he muttered half aloud—"a secret of state too. It is not possible that—" The last words were spoken so low that they were lost. Louis was evidently struggling with some painful but overwhelming conviction.

His head sunk on his breast. Again he became lost in thought. Then, looking up he saw that the Queen was watching him. She was waiting for him to speak. This awakened him suddenly to a consciousness of what was passing, and his anger burst forth afresh.

"You say I am your enemy—yes, I am, and with reason. Are you not devoted to the interests of Spain, now at war with France? Do you not betray me in letters to your brother? Answer me." It was now the Queen's turn to falter and turn pale. The King perceived it. "I have you there, Madame Anne; I have you there;" and he laughed vindictively. "My life is not safe beside you. Like my great father, I shall die by an assassin whose hand will be directed by my wife!" A cold shiver passed over him. "Richelieu has proofs. *Vrai Dieu*, Madame, he has proofs. It is possible," he added with a sardonic smile, which made him look ghastly, "that you may return to Madrid sooner than you imagine—you and the Duchesse de Chevreuse, your accomplice."

"Not sooner than I desire, Sire, after your unworthy treatment," exclaimed Anne proudly, her anger overcoming her fears that her letters might have been really deciphered. "I come of a race that cannot brook insult; but I can bear disgrace."

Louis, who felt that the Queen was getting the better of him, grew furious—"I will have no more words, Madame," shouted he; "we will deal with facts. I shall appeal to my minister and to my council. For myself, I am not fit to govern," he added in an altered voice, and with the forlorn air of a man who cannot help himself.

"Speak not to me, Sire, of Richelieu and the council over which he presides," cried Anne, goaded beyond endurance. "Richelieu is a traitor, a hypocrite, a libertine—not even his sovereign's wife is sacred to him!"

"Ah, Madame, it is natural that you and Richelieu should disagree," retorted the King, with an incredulous sneer. "He is a match for you and for the Duchess your counsellor—the Duchess whose life disgraces my Court."

Anne had now thown herself into a chair, her hands were crossed on her bosom, her eyes bent steadily on the King, as if prepared for whatever fresh extravagance he might utter. Even the enraged Louis felt the influence of her fixed, stern gaze. He ceased speaking, grew suddenly confused, paced up and down hurriedly, stopped, essayed again to address her—then abruptly strode out of the room.

* * * * *

The Queen and her ladies are seated on a stone balcony that overlooks the parterre and the park of Saint-Germain. Below, the King's violins are playing some music of his composition, set to words in praise of friendship, full of covert allusions to Mademoiselle de Hautefort. The Queen's fair young face is clouded with care; she leans back listlessly in her chair, and takes no heed of the music or of what is passing around her. The Chevalier de Jars approaches her. There is something in his air that alarms her; she signs to him to place himself beside her.

Mademoiselle de Hautefort, conscious that every one is watching the effect of the music and the words upon her, sits apart at the farther end of the gallery, from which the balcony projects, almost concealed from view. A door near her opens noiselessly and the King puts in his head. He peers round cautiously, sees that no one has perceived him, and that Mademoiselle de Hautefort is alone, then he creeps in and seats himself by her side. He looks saddened and perplexed.

"Why do you shun me?" he asks abruptly.

"You have been absent, Sire."

"Did you miss me?" His voice sounds so strange and hollow that Mademoiselle de Hautefort

looks up into his face. Something had happened; what could it be? Some misfortune to the Queen is always her first thought. Before she can reply, Louis sighs profoundly, so profoundly that he almost groans, contemplating her, at the same time, with looks of inexpressible sorrow. "Alas!" exclaims he at last, "I had hoped so much from this interview when we parted at Fontainebleau; I have lived upon the thought, and now—my dream is ended; all is over!" The maid of honour grows alarmed: either he is gone mad, she thinks, or something dreadful has happened.

"I cannot conceive what you mean, Sire?" she replies, not knowing what to say.

"Are you, too, false?" he continues, "with those eyes so full of truth? Yet it must be you, it can be no other. False like the rest; a devil with an angel's face!" The maid of honour is more and more amazed. "Yet I trusted you; with my whole heart I have trusted you," and he turns to her with a piteous expression, and wrings his hands. "I unfolded to you my forlorn and desolate condition. It might have touched you. Tell me," he continues, in a tone of anguish, "tell me the truth; was it you who betrayed me?"

Mademoiselle de Hautefort is terribly confused.

She understands now what the King means; a mortal terror seizes her; what shall she say to him? She is too conscientious to deny point-blank that she has told his secret, so she replies evasively, "that she is his Majesty's faithful servant."

"But, speak," insists the King, "give me a plain answer. How does the Queen know a state secret, that I confided to you alone, that I even whispered in your ear?"

"Sire, I—I do not know," falters the maid of honour.

"Swear to me, mademoiselle, that you have not betrayed me to the Queen; swear, and I will believe you. *Pardieu!* I will believe you even if it is not true!" Louis's eyes shine with hidden fire; his slight frame quivers.

Mademoiselle de Hautefort, trembling for her mistress, with difficulty controls herself. "Your Majesty must judge me as you please," she replies, struggling to speak with unconcern. "I call God to witness I have been faithful to my trust."

"I would fain believe it," replies the King, watching her in painful suspense; he seems to wait for some further justification, but not another syllable passes her lips. Still the King lingers; his looks are riveted upon her.

At this moment the music ceases. The maid of honour starts up, for the Queen has left the balcony. The King had vanished.

Anne of Austria, quitting those around her, advances alone to the spot where Mademoiselle de Hautefort had been talking with the King. "I am going at once to the Val de Grâce," she whispers in great agitation.

"Indeed, Madame; so suddenly?"

"Yes, at once. I have just heard from the Chevalier de Jars that Chalais is arrested at Nantes. He accuses me and the Duchess de Chevreuse of conspiring with him. Richelieu meditates some *coup de main* against me. I shall be safe at the Val de Grâce. You and the Duchess will accompany me. Here is a letter I have written in pencil to my brother; it is most important. I dare not carry it about me; take care to deliver it yourself to Laporte."

The Queen drew from her pocket a letter, placed it in the maid of honour's hand, and hastened back to rejoin the company. Mademoiselle was about to follow her, when Louis suddenly rose up before her, and barred her advance.

"Mademoiselle de Hautefort," he said, "I have heard all. I was concealed behind that curtain.

Give me that letter, written by my wife, I command you."

"Never, Sire, never!" and Mademoiselle de Hautefort crushed the letter in her hand.

"How—dare you refuse me? Give it to me instantly;" and he tried to tear it from her grasp. She eluded him, retreated a few steps, and paused for a moment to think; then, as if a sudden inspiration had struck her, she opened the lace kerchief which covered her neck, thrust the letter into her bosom, and exclaimed:—

"Here it is, Sire; come and take it!"

With outstretched arms she stood before him; her cheeks aglow with blushes, her bosom wildly heaving. Wistfully he regarded her for a moment, then thrust out his hand to seize the letter, plainly visible beneath the gauzy covering. One glance from her flashing eye, and the King, crimson to the temples, drew back; irresistibly impelled, he advanced again and once more retreated, then with a look of baffled fury shouted, "Now I *know* you are a traitress!" and rushed from the gallery.

CHAPTER XXXV.

AT VAL DE GRÂCE.

The ancient Benedictine abbey of the Val Profond, near Bièvre le Châlet, three leagues from Paris, was founded by Robert, son of Hugh Capet. Soon after her arrival in France, Anne of Austria bought the ground upon which the then ruined abbey stood, moved the nuns to Paris, and placed them in a convent called the Val de Grâce,[1] under the Mont Parnasse, near the Luxembourg Gardens. To this convent of the Val de Grâce the Queen often resorted to seek in prayer and meditation (for she was eminently pious), consolation and repose. On these occasions she occupied a suite of rooms specially set apart for her use.

It is a bright morning, and the sunshine streams through the painted windows, and streaks the marble floor of the Queen's oratory with chequered colours. To the east, under a lofty window, stands an altar, covered with a costly cloth, on which, in

[1] See Note 23.

golden sconces, burn many votive candles. Anne of Austria is seated in a recess, on a carved chair of dark oak. She is dressed in black, her golden curls are gathered under a sober coif; she looks pale, and ill at ease; her eyes, dulled by want of sleep, are anxious and restless, but there is a resolution in her bearing that shows she is prepared to meet whatever calamity awaits her with the courage of her race. Mademoiselle de Hautefort sits on a low stool at her feet. She is weeping bitterly.

"Ah! Madame," she sobs, "this is Richelieu's revenge. It is all his doing. How could your Majesty listen to the advice of that wild Duchess, and affront him so cruelly at Saint-Germain? Alas! he will persecute you as long as he lives."

"I cannot recall the past," answers Anne sadly.

"Had you reposed confidence in me, Madame, this would never have happened. Madame de Chevreuse has sacrificed you to her love of intrigue."

"My poor Chevreuse, she is no more to blame than I am. Where is the Duchess, mademoiselle?"

While the Queen speaks a sound of wheels entering the courtyard from the street of Saint-Jacques breaks the silence. A moment after Madame de Chevreuse rushes into the oratory, so

hidden in a black hood and a long cloak that no one would have recognized her. She flings herself on her knees before the Queen, and grasps her hands.

"Ah, my dear mistress, you are saved!" she cries breathlessly. Anne raises her and kisses her tenderly. "I am just come from the Bastille. I went there disguised as a priest. I have seen Chalais. The Cardinal interpreted what Chalais said—purposely, of course—into meaning an attempt upon the life of the King."

"Great God!" exclaims Anne, turning her glistening eyes to heaven, "what wickedness!"

"The King has joined the Cardinal in a purpose to prosecute your Majesty for treason. His Majesty is furious. He declares that he will repudiate you, and send you back into Spain. He has commanded the Chancellor Séguier and the Archbishop of Paris to repair here to the Convent of the Val de Grâce to search your private papers for proofs of your guilt and of your treasonable intrigues with Spain. They are close at hand. I feared lest they had already arrived before I could return and apprise your Majesty."

"But what of Chalais?" cries Anne. "Why did you visit him in the Bastille?"

"To learn what had passed between him and

the Cardinal. We must all tell the same story. Chalais confesses to me that in the confusion of his arrest at Nantes he did let fall some expressions connecting your Majesty, Monsieur, and myself with the plot against Richelieu, and that when questioned he avowed that he acted with your knowledge."

"Ah, the coward!" cries Mademoiselle de Hautefort bitterly. "And you love him."

"No, mademoiselle, Chalais is no coward. He is a noble gentleman, whose fortitude will yet save her Majesty. He has been betrayed by Louvigni, the traitor, out of jealousy. Do not interrupt me, mademoiselle," continues the Duchess, seeing that Mademoiselle de Hautefort is again about to break forth into reproaches against Chalais. "No sooner had Chalais arrived at the Bastille than Richelieu visited him in his cell. He offered him his life if he would consent to inculpate your Majesty in the plot. Chalais refused, and asserted that the plot of which you were informed by Monsieur the Duc d'Orléans, was directed against himself; and he told the Cardinal he might tear him in pieces with wild horses before he would say one word to your Majesty's prejudice."

"Generous Chalais!" exclaims the Queen, clasping her hands. "Can he not be saved?"

"No, Madame, my noble friend must die. He knows it, and places his life at your feet."

Anne sobs violently.

"Horrible! Oh, that I should cost those who love me so dear! Proceed, Duchess."

"The Cardinal had in the meantime, as soon as your Majesty left Saint-Germain, sent to force your drawers and cabinets for papers." Anne rises to her feet, white with terror. "Never fear, Madame; I had thought of that. Laporte had destroyed everything by my order. Only one letter to your brother the King of Spain was found. It was written the day you left, and confided by you, Mademoiselle de Hautefort, to Laporte," and the Duchess gives a spiteful glance at the maid of honour. "Before he dispatched it, Laporte was seized and searched."

"There was nothing in that letter derogatory to me as Queen of France," says the Queen quickly. "I spoke of Richelieu's insane passion for me, and described the scene at Saint-Germain, and I told him I was about to leave for the Val de Grâce; nothing more. The Cardinal will not show that letter."

"Yes, Madame, God be praised! it is so. But it was absolutely necessary that I should tell Chalais that but one letter had been found, and that perfectly innocent, before he was examined by the Cardinal. I have told him. He knows he can save his Queen. He is content to die!" As the Duchess speaks, the sound of wheels again interrupts them. "Hark! The Chancellor and the Archbishop have arrived. Courage, your Majesty! All now depends on your presence of mind. Nothing will be found in this convent, and Laporte waits at the door without. He will suffer no one to enter."

Anne flings herself into the arms of the Duchess.

"You have saved me!" she cries, and covers her with kisses.

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An hour has passed. Laporte knocks at the door, and enters. His looks betray the alarm he tries to conceal.

"The Chancellor, Madame, has arrived, in company with the Archbishop of Paris," he says, addressing the Queen. "The Archbishop has commanded the Abbess, the venerable Louise de Milli, and all the sisterhood, who went out to meet him, to return each one within her cell, and not to

exchange a single word together during the time he remains in the convent, under pain of excommunication." The Queen and the Duchess exchange anxious glances. Laporte speaks again with much hesitation, "I regret to say that the Chancellor then proceeded to search all the cells. No papers were found." The Duchess clasps her hands with exultation. "How can I go on?" Laporte groans, the tears coming into his eyes. "Forgive me, Madame; I cannot help it." The Queen makes an impatient gesture, and Laporte continues: "The Chancellor craves your Majesty's pardon, but desires me to tell you that he bears a royal warrant, which he must obey, to search your private apartment, and this oratory also."

"Let him have every facility, my good Laporte," answers the Queen collectedly. "Mademoiselle de Hautefort, deliver up all my keys to Laporte."

"The Chancellor and the Archbishop desire to speak also to the lady-in-waiting on your Majesty, the Duchesse de Chevreuse," Laporte adds.

"What new misfortune is this?" cries Anne of Austria, turning very pale. "Go, dear Duchess; all is not yet over, I fear."

Madame de Chevreuse leaves the oratory with Laporte. The Queen casts herself on her knees

before the sacred relics exposed on the altar. She hides her face in her hands.

It was not long before the Duchess returns. Her triumphant air has vanished. She tries to appear unconcerned, but cannot. Anne rises from her knees, and looks at her in silence.

"Speak, Madame de Chevreuse; I can bear it," she says meekly.

"Alas! my dear mistress, Richelieu's vengeance is not yet complete. The Chancellor has announced to me that a Council of State is about to assemble in the refectory of the convent. You are summoned to appear, to answer personally certain matters laid to your charge."

Mademoiselle de Hautefort utters a loud scream. The Queen, her eyes riveted on the Duchess, neither moves nor speaks for some moments.

"You have more to say. Speak, Duchess," she says at last in a low voice.

"Nothing whatever has been found—no line, no paper. I took care of that," and the Duchess smiles faintly.

"You have not yet told me all. I must hear it. Conceal nothing," again insists the Queen.

"Alas! it is indeed as you say. The Chancellor"—and her voice falls almost to a whisper—

"has express orders under the King's hand to search your Majesty's *person*."

"Search an anointed Queen!" exclaims Anne of Austria. "Never!" and she stretches out her arms wildly towards the altar. "Holy Virgin, help me!" she cries.

At this moment the sound of many footsteps are heard without in the stone passage, approaching the door. Anne of Austria has risen; she stands in the centre of the oratory; an unwonted fire glows in her eyes, a look of unmistakable command spreads itself over her whole person. Never had she looked more royal than in this moment of extreme humiliation. The Duchess rushes to the door and draws the ponderous bolts. "Now let them come," cries she, "if they dare!" They all listen in breathless silence. The voice of Laporte, who has returned to his post outside the door, is heard in low but angry altercation. Then he is heard to say, in a loud voice—

"No one can be admitted to her Majesty, save only the King, without her permission."

"We command you in the name of the law. Stand aside!" is the reply.

Then another voice speaks:—

"We are the bearers of an order from the King

and the Council of State to see her Majesty." It is the Chancellor's voice, and his words are distinctly audible within.

"I know of no order but from the Queen my mistress. Your Grace shall not pass. If you do, it shall be across my body," Laporte is heard to reply.

"We enter our solemn protest against this breach of the law; but we decline to force her Majesty's pleasure." It was still the Chancellor who spoke. Then the sound of receding footsteps told that he was gone.

"Where will this end?" asks Anne in a hollow voice, sinking into a chair.

The Duchess and Mademoiselle de Hautefort fling their arms round her.

"Bear up, Madame, the worst is over. Be only firm; they can prove nothing," whispers the Duchess. "There is not a tittle of evidence against you."

"Ah, but, my friend, you forget that the King is eager to repudiate me. Mademoiselle de Hautefort knows it from his own lips."

"He cannot, without proofs of your guilt," the Duchess answers resolutely. "There are none. And if he does, *qu'importe?* Why mar that queenly brow with sorrow, and wrinkle those

delicate cheeks with tears? Be like me, Madame, a citizen of the world —Madrid, Paris, London— what matters? The sun shines as brightly in other lands as here. Life and love are everywhere. You are young, beautiful, courageous. To see you is to love you. Swords will start from their scabbards to defend you. Your exile in your brother's Court will be a triumph. You will rule all hearts; you will still be the sovereign of youth, of poetry, and of song!"

As she speaks the Duchess's countenance beams with enthusiasm. Anne of Austria shakes her head sorrowfully, and is silent.

"You are happy, Duchess, in such volatile spirits," says Mademoiselle de Hautefort contemptuously, her eyes all the while fixed on her royal mistress; "but I cannot look on the disgrace of the Queen of France as though it were the finale to a page's roundelay."

The sound of many heavy coaches thundering into the inner court of the convent puts a stop to further conversation.

"The council is assembling!" exclaims the Duchess.

At these words the Queen rises mechanically; her large eyes, dilated and widely open, are fixed

on vacancy, as though the vision of some unspoken horror, some awful disaster, had risen before her. She knows it is the crisis of her life. From that chamber she may pass to banishment, prison, or death. For a moment her mind wanders. She looks round wildly. "Spare me! spare me!" she murmurs, and she wrings her hands. "Alas! I am too young to die!" Then collecting her scattered senses, she moves forward with measured steps. "I am ready," she says, in a hollow voice. "Unbar the door."

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE QUEEN BEFORE THE COUNCIL.

The refectory of the convent of the Val de Grâce is a vast apartment, dimly lit by rows of small lancet windows placed along the side walls. These walls are bare, panelled with dark wood, and great oaken rafters span the tented roof. At the eastern end hangs a large crucifix of silver. In the centre of the apartment is a table, round which the three principal members of the council are assembled. Alone, at the head, is the King, uneasily seated on the corner of a huge chair. His whole body is shrunk and contracted, as though he were undergoing some agonizing penance. He never raises his eyes, and his pallid face works with nervous excitement. His hat is drawn over his brow; his hands are clasped upon his knees. That he had come in haste is apparent, for he wears his usual dark hunting-dress.

At his right hand is the Cardinal, wearing a

long tightly fitting *soutane* of purple silk, with a cloak of the same colour. His countenance is perfectly impassive, save that when he moves, and the light from above strikes upon his dark eyes, they glitter. In his delicate hands he holds some papers, to which he refers from time to time; others lie on the table near him. Opposite the Cardinal are the Archbishop of Paris and the Chancellor Séguier. At the farther end of the council-table, facing the King, Anne of Austria is seated. The colour comes and goes upon her downy cheeks; but otherwise no sovereign throned in fabled state is more queenly than this golden-haired daughter of the Cæsars.

The Cardinal turns towards her, but, before addressing her, his eyes are gathered fixedly upon her. Then, in a placid voice, he speaks—

"Your Majesty has been summoned by the King here present to answer certain matters laid to your charge."

Anne of Austria rises and makes an obeisance, looking towards the King, then reseats herself.

"I am here to answer whatever questions his Majesty sees good to put to me," she replies, in a clear, firm voice.

"His Majesty, Madame, speaks through *my*

voice," says Richelieu significantly, observing her pointed reference to the King's presence; "I am here as his *alter ego*. It is said," he continues, in the same impassive manner with which he had at first addressed her, "that you, Madame Anne of Austria, consort of the King, hold a treasonable correspondence in cipher with your brother, Philip, King of Spain, now waging war against this realm of France, and that therein you betray to him secrets of state to the manifest hurt and danger of the King's armies, by affording treacherous foreknowledge of their movements and of the measures of his Government. What answer does your Majesty make to so grave a charge?"

"If it be so, let these letters be produced," answers the Queen boldly. "I declare that beyond the natural love I bear my brother and his consort, Elizabeth of France, sister to the King,—which love surely is no crime,—I have never, by word or deed, betrayed aught that I might know to the prejudice of the King, my husband, or of this great country of which I am the Queen."

"Why, then, Madame, if these letters were harmless, did you write in a cipher unknown to the King's ministers?" asks the Cardinal, bending his piercing eyes keenly upon her.

"Because," replies the Queen, "I knew that spies were set, by the King's order, at *your* instance," and she points to the Cardinal, "to waylay these letters, the writing of which has been to me, next to God, my greatest comfort in much sorrow and persecution which I have suffered wrongfully since I came into France."

"Madame," continues Richelieu, speaking with the same unmoved voice and manner, "do you know Henry de Talleyrand, Comte de Chalais, Master of the Robes to his Majesty, and once esteemed by him as his faithful subject?"

"I do know him," answers the Queen.

"Do you also know that this gentleman, the Comte de Chalais, has been lately arrested at Nantes, and is now lying in the prison of the Bastille, accused of having treacherously conspired against the sacred person of his Majesty, with the design of placing on the throne, at his death, Monseigneur, Duc d'Orléans —brother of the King; and that the Comte de Chalais avers and declares, before witnesses, that he acted by your order and by your counsel? What answer have you to make to this, Madame?"

"That it is false, and unsupported by any evidence whatever, and that you, Cardinal Richelieu, know that it is false." Then Anne of Austria

raises her hands towards the crucifix hanging before her—"By the blessed wounds of our Lord Jesus, I swear that I never knew that the life of the King, my husband, was threatened; if it were so, it was concealed from me." A stifled groan is heard from the King. Both the Chancellor and the Archbishop appear greatly impressed by the Queen's solemn declaration, and whisper together. Richelieu alone is unmoved.

Then the Queen rises, and, for the first time, turns her large eyes full upon the Cardinal, over whose frame a momentary tremor passes. "It was of another plot that the Comte de Chalais spoke; and of another assassination, not that of the King. His Majesty himself—if I mistake not—knew and did not disapprove of *this other* project, and of removing *him* whom I mean. Nevertheless I shrank from the proposal with horror; I expressly forbade all bloodshed, although it would have removed a deadly enemy from my path." And the Queen, while she speaks, fixes her undaunted gaze full on the Cardinal, who casts down his eyes on the papers he holds in his hands. "Let his Majesty confront me with Chalais; he will confirm the truth of what I say." Anne of Austria stops to watch the effect of her words. Something like a groan again

escapes from the King; he pulls at his beard, and moves uneasily in his chair, as the Cardinal's lynx eyes are directed, for an instant, towards him with a malignant glare. The Cardinal stoops to consult some documents that lie upon the table, and for a few moments not a word was uttered. Then resuming his former placid voice and manner, Richelieu faces the Queen, and proceeds:—

"Further, Madame, it is averred, and it is believed by his Majesty, that you, forgetting the duty of a wife, and the loyalty of a Queen, have exchanged love-tokens with the said prince of the blood, Gaston, Duc d'Orléans, now for his manifest treason fled into Spain,"—at these words, to which she listens with evident horror, Anne clasps her hands;—"further, that you, Madame, and your lady of the bedchamber, Marie de Lorraine, Duchesse de Chevreuse, did conspire, with Chalais and others, for this unholy purpose."

Anne's face is suffused with a deep blush of shame while the Cardinal speaks; for a moment her courage seems to fail her—then, collecting herself, she stretches out her arms towards the King, and says solemnly, "I call on his Majesty, Louis—surnamed the Just—my husband, to confront me with my accusers: I am innocent of this foul charge."

At this appeal the King half rises, as if with an intention to speak, then sinks back again into his chair. His features twitch convulsively; he never raises his eyes.

"Is that all you have to reply to the wicked and murderous project said to be entertained by you of wedding, *from inclination*, with the King's brother, at his death, if by feeble health, or any other accident, his Majesty had been removed?" and the Cardinal bends his glassy eyes earnestly upon the Queen.

"I reply that I should have gained nothing by the change. The Duc d'Orléans is as fickle and unworthy as his Majesty, who sits by unmoved, and hears his consort slandered by her enemies." Anne's eyes flash fire; her indignation had carried her beyond fear; she stands before the council more like a judge than a criminal. "Have a care, Armand de Plessis, Cardinal Minister and *tyrant* of France, that you question me not too closely," the Queen adds in a lower voice, addressing herself directly to Richelieu. As she speaks she puts her hand to her bosom, and discloses, between the folds of her dark velvet robe, a portion of a letter, bound with purple cord, which Richelieu instantly recognises as the identical one he had addressed to

her at Saint-Germain, asking for a private audience. The Cardinal visibly shudders; his whole expression changes; his impassive look is turned to one of anxiety and doubt; he passes his hands over his forehead, as if to shade his eyes from the light, but in reality to give his fertile brain a few moments' time in which to devise some escape from the danger that threatens him should the Queen produce that letter before the council. So rapid has been the Queen's action that no one else has perceived it. Something peculiar, however, in the tone of her voice attracts the notice of the King, who, rousing himself from the painful abstraction into which he has fallen, gazes round for the first time, and bends his lustreless grey eyes suspiciously on the Cardinal, and from him on the Queen; then shaking his head doubtfully, he again resumes his former weary attitude. Meanwhile the Queen, imagining that she perceives some compassion in that momentary glance, rises and advances close to the edge of the council-table. Grief, anger, and reproach are in her looks. With a haughty gesture she signs to the Cardinal to be silent, clasps her small hands so tightly that the nails redden her tender skin, and, in a plaintive voice, addresses herself directly to the King. "Oh, Sire, is not

your heart moved with pity to behold a great princess, such as I, your wife, and who might have been the mother of your children, stand before you here like a criminal, to suffer the scorn and malice of her enemies?"—she is so overcome that her voice falters, and she hastily brushes the starting tears from her eyes. "I know," she continues, with her appealing eyes resting on the King, "I know that you are weary of me, and that your purpose is, if possible, to repudiate me and send me back into Spain; you have confessed as much to one of my maids of honour, who, shocked at the proposal, repeated it to me. I appeal to yourself, Sire, if this be not true?" and laying one hand on the table she leans forward towards Louis, waiting for his reply; but, although he does not answer her appeal, he whispers a few words into the ear of the Archbishop, standing next to him, who bows. Then he falls back on his chair, as if weary and exhausted by a hopeless struggle. "My lords, the King cannot deny it," says Anne of Austria triumphantly, addressing the council; "My lords, I have never, since I came into France, a girl of fifteen, been permitted to occupy my legitimate place in his Majesty's affections. The Queen-dowager Marie de Medici, poisoned his mind

against me; and now Cardinal Richelieu, *her creature*,"—and Anne casts a look of ineffable disdain at Richelieu—"continues the same policy, because he dreads my influence, and desires wholly to possess himself of the King's confidence, the better to rule him and France."

The Queen's bold words had greatly impressed the council in her favour. The Archbishop and the Chancellor consult anxiously together. At length the Archbishop of Paris interposes.

"Her Majesty the Queen appears to have explained most satisfactorily all the accusations made against her. I was myself present at the examination of her private apartments within this convent of the Val de Grâce. Nothing was found but proofs of her pious sentiments and devout exercises, such as scourges, girdles spiked with iron to mortify the flesh, books of devotion and missals. It is to be desired that all royal ladies could disarm suspicion like her Majesty. If, therefore, the evidence which the Cardinal holds be in accordance with her Majesty's declarations, all the charges may be withdrawn, and her Majesty be returned to those royal dignities and honours which she so fitly adorns. Speak, Cardinal Richelieu, do you hold counter evidence—yea, or nay?"

The Cardinal does not at once answer. He shuffles some papers in his hands, then turns towards the King, and whispers in his ear. Louis makes an impatient gesture of assent, and resumes his despondent attitude.

"I have his Majesty's commands for replying," answers Richelieu, "that no letters implicating the Queen in treasonable correspondence with her brother have been at present actually found, although his Majesty has reason to believe that such exist. Also that the Comte de Chalais's statements are in accordance with those of her Majesty. Also that the King acquits Madame Anne, his consort, of the purpose of marrying with his brother, Monsieur Duc d'Orléans, on whom *alone* must rest the onus of such a crime. Usher of the Court, summon the Queen's ladies-in-waiting to attend her. Your Majesty is free," adds Richelieu, and the mocking tone of his voice betrays involuntarily something of the inward rage he labours to conceal. "Madame Anne of Austria, you are no longer a prisoner of state under examination by the council, but are, as before, in full possession of the privileges, powers, immunities and revenues belonging to the Queen Consort of France."

Anne of Austria leaves her chair, salutes his

Majesty with a profound obeisance, of which Louis takes no other notice than to turn his eyes to the ceiling, and then advances towards the door. The Chancellor and the Archbishop rise at the same time from the council-table, and hasten to open the door by which she is to pass out, bowing humbly before her.

"The royal carriages are in waiting, Madame," whispered the Duchesse de Chevreuse, who, with Mademoiselle de Hautefort, were waiting outside; and she wrung the Queen's hand. "My dear, dear mistress, I know you are free!"

"Praised be God!" replied Anne, "I have escaped," and she kissed her on both cheeks, as also her maid of honour, who was so overcome she could not say one word of congratulation.

"Come, Madame," cried the Duchesse de Chevreuse, "let us leave this dreadful place, I beseech you, lest the Cardinal should concoct some fresh plot to detain you."

"Duchess," replied Anne gaily, "you shall command me. It is to you I owe my liberty. But for your forethought those unhappy letters, wrung from me in moments of anguish—ah! of despair, would have been found, and I should at this moment have been on my way to the Bas-

tille. My good Hautefort, you have not spoken to me. You look sad. What is it?" and the Queen took her hand.

"It is because I have contributed nothing towards your Majesty's freedom. Besides, a foreboding of coming evil overpowers me," and she burst into tears.

She again kissed her, and led her by the hand towards the cumbrous coach which was to bear her to Paris. As Anne was preparing to mount into it, assisted by her page and Laporte, who had reappeared, the Chevalier de Jars approached hastily, and bowed before her.

"How now, Chevalier! any more ill news? What is your business here?" asked Anne.

"It is with this lady," said he, turning to the maid of honour. "Mademoiselle de Hautefort, you cannot accompany her Majesty to Paris."

"Why, Chevalier?" demanded Anne impatiently, still holding her hand.

"Because I am commanded to make known to you that Mademoiselle de Hautefort is exiled from France during his Majesty's pleasure. I am charged, mademoiselle, to show you this token," and he produced the other half of the golden medallion which Louis had broken during their

interview at Fontainebleau. "The King bid me say that by this token he himself commands your instant departure."

The Queen clasped her in her arms.

"My poor Hautefort, is it indeed so? Must I lose my trusty friend?"

Mademoiselle de Hautefort threw herself, weeping bitterly, at the Queen's feet.

"Alas! Madame," sobbed she, "I am banished because I have been faithful to you!"

"Have you got another order—for my arrest, *par exemple*, Chevalier?" asked the Duchess archly. "I have also committed the awful crime of faithfulness to her Majesty. I suppose I shall go next."

The Chevalier shook his head.

"No, madame. You will accompany the Queen to the Louvre."

The Duchesse de Chevreuse did accompany the Queen to the Louvre; but, on arriving there, she found a *lettre de cachet* banishing her from France within twenty-four hours. A similar order was also served on the Chevalier de Jars.

The Queen was free, but her friends were exiled.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

LOUISE DE LAFAYETTE.

Louise de Lafayette—the only child of the Comte Jean de Lafayette, of Hauteville, and of Margaret de Boulon-Busset, his wife—was the young lady selected to fill the vacant post of maid of honour to the Queen, *vice* De Hautefort, banished.

So long a time had elapsed since the departure of the latter that it seemed as though Anne of Austria never intended to replace her; however, the new mistress of the robes, the Duchesse de Sennécy, a distant relative of Mademoiselle de Lafayette, urged the Queen so strongly in her favour, that the appointment was at last announced.

Louise de Lafayette had passed many years of her girlhood in a convent, and was somewhat *dévote*, but sincere in her piety, and good-natured to excess. Not only was she good-natured, but she was so entirely devoid of malice that it actually pained her to be made acquainted with the

faults of others. Perhaps her chief characteristic was an exaggerated sensibility, almost amounting to delusion. She created an ideal world around her, and peopled it with creatures of her own imagination, rather than the men and women of flesh and blood among whom she lived—a defect of youth which age and experience would rectify. She possessed that gift, so rare in women, of charming involuntarily — without effort or self-consciousness. When most attractive and most admired, she alone was unconscious of her power; envy itself was disarmed by her ingenuous humility.

Louise was twenty-three years old when she was presented to the Queen at Fontainebleau by the Principessa di Mantua, during her morning reception. The saloon was filled with company, and great curiosity was felt to see the successor of Mademoiselle de Hautefort. The most critical observers were satisfied. The new maid of honour, though modest and a little abashed, comported herself with perfect self-possession. She was superbly dressed, had a tall and supple figure, good features, and a complexion so exquisitely fair and fresh, and such an abundance of sunny hair, as to remind many in the circle of her Majesty when, in the dazzling

beauty of her fifteenth year, she came a bride into France. But Anne of Austria never had those large appealing grey eyes, beaming with all the confidence of a guileless heart, nor that air of maiden reserve which lent an unconscious charm to every movement, nor that calm and placid brow, unruffled by so much as an angry thought.

Why had not Mademoiselle de Lafayette married? was the general question which passed round the circle.

"Because she has found no one worthy of her," was the reply of her friend and cousin, the Duchesse de Sennécy.

After the new maid of honour had made her curtsey to the Queen, who received her very graciously, the King (who had as usual placed himself almost out of sight, near the door, in order to ensure a safe retreat if needful) emerged, and timidly addressed her.

Since the scene at the monastery of the Val de Grâce, and the discovery of Mademoiselle de Hautefort's treachery, Louis had never once appeared at the Queen's lever until this morning. At the few words of compliment he found courage to say to her, Louise blushed and curtsied, but made no reply.

The next day the King was again present at her Majesty's lever. He did not speak, but his eyes never for an instant left the new maid of honour.

The Court was at this time greatly agitated by political events. The Spaniards were making the most alarming progress in France; they had penetrated in the north as far as Corbie, in Picardy; in the south they were overrunning Provence. Troops and money were both wanting. The position of the ministry was so critical that even Richelieu was at fault. Louis, roused from his habitual apathy, suddenly remembered that he was the son of a great warrior, and electrified the Council of State by announcing that he intended at once to take the field in person. A resolve so contrary to his usual habits excited great discussion and general interest.

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The Saloon of Saint-Louis, at Fontainebleau, opens from the royal guard-room. It is a noble apartment, divided into a card-room and a *with*-drawing, or, as we say, drawing-room. The decorations are the same as those in the Gallery of Francis I.; the walls, painted in fresco after designs by Primaticcio, are divided by sculptured figures, in high relief, entwined by wreaths of flowers,

fruit, and foliage. The ceiling is blue, sown with golden stars. Lights blaze from the chandeliers disposed on marble tables and in the corners of the room, and display the artistic beauty of the various paintings and frescoes that cover the walls.

The Queen is playing cards with the Bishop of Limoges. The Court groups itself about the double rooms, and at the other card-tables. Near the Queen are her favourites of the hour, the Principesse di Gonzaga and di Mantua; the Duchesse de Sennécy is in attendance. The King is seated on a settee in the darkest and most distant corner. Anne dares not now treat him either with impertinence or *hauteur*. If she cannot bring herself actually to fear him, she knows that he is capable of revenge. She has learnt, however, both to fear and to dread his minister, Richelieu, under whose insolent dominion Louis's life is passed. Madame de Chevreuse is no longer at hand to tempt her into rebellion, and she has learnt to submit quietly, if not contentedly, to her lot. She has perceived the impression made upon the King by her new maid of honour, and looks on amused and indifferent. Of the absolute goodness and perfect rectitude of Louise de Lafayette, no one, and certainly not the Queen, could entertain a doubt.

As she pushes the cards towards the Bishop of Limoges to deal for her, which he does after making her a low bow, she turns round, the better to observe his Majesty. He has moved from the settee, and is now seated in earnest conversation with Mademoiselle de Lafayette. A sneer gathers about the corners of her rosy mouth, and her eyes dwell upon him for an instant with an expression of intense contempt; then she shrugs her snowy shoulders, leans back in her chair, takes up the cards that lie before her, and rapidly sorts them. The conversation between Louis and Mademoiselle de Lafayette is low and earnest. His naturally dismal face expresses more lively interest, and his lack-lustre eyes are more animated than they have been for years. As to the maid of honour, she listens to him with every faculty of her being, and hangs upon his words as though, to her at least, they are inspired.

"The condition of France," the King is saying, "overwhelms me. Would that I could offer up my life for my beloved country! Would that I possessed my great father's military genius to defend her! I go, perhaps never to return! Alas! no one will miss me," and he heaves a heavy sigh, and the tears gather in his eyes.

The maid of honour longs to tell him all the interest she feels for him, her genuine admiration, her devotion, her pity for his desolate condition; but she is new to court life, and, like himself, she is too timid as yet to put her feelings into words. She sits beside him motionless as a statue, not daring even to lift up her eyes, lest they may betray her.

"Happy, ah! happy beyond words is the man who feels he is beloved, who feels that he is missed!"—here Louis stops, casts a reproachful glance at the Queen, whose back was towards him, then a shy, furtive look at Mademoiselle de Lafayette, whose heightened colour and quickened breathing betrays the intensity of her feelings: "such a one," continues the King, "has a motive for desiring fame; he can afford to risk his life in the front of the battle. Were I"—and his voice sinks almost into a whisper—"were I dear to any one, which I know I am not, I should seek to live in history, like my father. As it is," and he sighs, "I know that I possess no quality that kindles sympathy. I am betrayed by those whom I most trust, and hated and despised by those who are bound by nature and by law to love and honour me. My death would be a boon to some"—again

his eyes seek out the Queen—"and a blessing to myself. I am a blighted and a miserable man. Sometimes I ask myself why I should live at all?" It was not possible for the human countenance to express more absolute despair than does the King's face at this moment.

"Oh, Sire!" was all Mademoiselle de Lafayette dare trust herself to reply; indeed, she is so choked by rising sobs that it is not possible for her to say more.

The King is conscious that her voice trembles; he notices also that her bosom heaves, and that she had suddenly grown very pale. Her silence, then, was not from lack of interest. Louis feels infinitely gratified by the discovery of this mute sympathy. All that was suppressed and unspoken had a subtle charm to his morbid nature. After a few moments of silence, Louis, fearful lest the Queen's keen eyes should be turned upon them, rises. "I deeply deplore, mademoiselle, that this conversation must now end. Let me hope that it may be again resumed before my departure for the army." Louise does not reply, but one speaking glance tells him he will not be refused.

At supper, and when she attends the Queen in her private apartments, she is so absent that her

friend, Madame de Sennécy, reprimands her sharply.

The next morning the Duchess went to her young cousin's room. Madame de Sennécy had a very decided taste for intrigue, and would willingly have replaced the Duchesse de Chevreuse in the confidence of Anne of Austria, but she wanted her predecessor's daring wit, her adroitness, witcheries, and beauty; above all, she lacked that generous devotion to her mistress, which turned her life into a romance. Now Madame de Sennécy thought she saw a chance of advancing her interests by means of her cousin's growing favour with the King. She would gain her confidence, and by retailing her secrets excite the jealousy and secure the favour of the Queen.

"My dear child," said she, kissing Louise on both cheeks, a bland smile upon her face, "will you excuse my early visit?" She seated herself opposite to Mademoiselle de Lafayette, the better to observe her. "Excuse the warmth with which I spoke to you last night in the Queen's sleeping-room; but really, whatever attention the King may pay you, *ma chère*, you must not allow yourself to grow careless in her Majesty's service. As mistress of the robes I cannot permit it. All the

world, my dear cousin, sees he is in love with you"—Louise blushed to the roots of her hair, shook her head, and looked confused and unhappy —"of course he loves you in his fashion. I mean," added Madame de Sennécy quickly, seeing her distress, and not giving her time to remonstrate, "a perfectly Platonic love, nothing improper, of course. He loves you timidly, modestly, even in his most secret thoughts. I am told by his attendants that the King shows every sign of a great passion, much more intense than he ever felt for Mademoiselle de Hautefort, who, after all, trifled with him, and never was sincere."

"I do not know the King well enough, Duchess, to venture an opinion on his character," replied Mademoiselle de Lafayette, with diffidence, "but I may say that if I had any prepossessions against his Majesty, I have lost them; I am sure he is capable of the tenderest friendship; he longs to open his heart to a real friend. His confidence has been hitherto abused."

"My dear child, I have come here to advise you to be—well—that friend."

"Oh! madame, I fear I am too inexperienced to be of use to him; but if the King does ask my advice, which seems very presumptuous in me to

suppose, I shall conceal nothing that I think, neither facts nor opinions."

"Ah, my cousin, try to rouse him; make him reign for himself; tell him to shake off that dreadful Cardinal."

"That is, I fear, impossible; I am too ignorant of politics. Besides, what can I do now? he is going away to the war."

"Well, but, *petite sotte*, he will return, and you will meet again."

"Oh, no," replied Louise, again colouring under the scrutinizing eye of the mistress of the robes, "he will forget me long before that."

"Nothing of the kind, Louise," replied the Duchess, "the King never forgets anything."

"Dear Duchess, you really are talking nonsense. What on earth could make the King care for me?" and she sighed deeply, and fell into a muse. "I do pity him, though," she added, speaking with great feeling; "I pity him, I own. He is naturally good — brave — confiding," and she paused between each word.

"I am glad you find him so," answered the Duchess drily.

"Yet he ill fulfils his glorious mission," continued Louise, as if speaking to herself. "He is

conscious of it, and it pains him. I am sure he suffers acutely."

"Heal his wounds, then," said the Duchess with a cynical smile, but speaking in so low a voice that Mademoiselle de Lafayette did not catch the words.

"Ah! if he had but one true friend, he might emulate his great father! Did you hear, Duchess, with what firmness he addressed the deputies yesterday, who had refused to register the royal edicts for raising the necessary funds for the army? 'This money,' he said, 'is not for myself, but for the nation, and to maintain the national honour. Those who refuse it, injure France more than her enemies the Spaniards. I will be obeyed,' he said. There was energy! Oh, it was noble!" and her eyes glistened and her cheeks glowed.

"I suppose the Cardinal had composed this neat little speech for him beforehand," replied the Duchess with a sneer, contemplating her cousin with amused inquisitiveness. "You do not believe he ever spoke like that himself? You do not know him as well as I do, else you would not be so enthusiastic. However, it is all as it should be. I do not desire to disenchant you, I am sure. *Au revoir*," and the Duchess left the room.

The next morning, before his departure for the

campaign, Louis went to bid the Queen farewell. It was only a formal visit, and he stayed scarcely a minute. The Queen did not affect to care what might become of him. On leaving her audience-chamber he lingered in the ante-room in which her attendants were assembled. Mademoiselle de Lafayette was seated, with another maid, in a recess; she,—Mademoiselle de Guerchy,—seeing the King's anxious looks, at once rose and retired. He immediately took her place, and signed to Louise to seat herself beside him. Separated from her companion, and sitting apart with Louis, Louise suddenly remembered that it was precisely thus the King had conversed *tête-à-tête* with Mademoiselle de Hautefort; she became greatly embarrassed.

"I come," said the King, turning towards her, and speaking in a plaintive voice, "I come to bid you adieu."

Louise bent her head, and put her handkerchief to her eyes. Louis started at seeing the big tears roll down her cheeks.

"I have enjoyed few moments of happiness in the course of my dreary life," continued he, pressing her hand, "but this is one."

He broke off, overcome apparently by his feelings. Louise wiped the tears from her eyes.

"Sire, believe me, I only feel the same emotion as thousands of your faithful subjects at a moment when you are about to lead the campaign against Spain. If you would condescend to inform yourself of general opinion you would find it as I say."

"It may be, mademoiselle; but I only wish now to know *your* feelings. If you will indeed be to me the devoted friend I have so long sought in vain, my entire confidence shall be yours. I go to-morrow, but the most tender recollections will cling to me." As he spoke he took her hand in his and kissed it with fervour. "Think of me, I implore you, with the same interest you now display. Believe me, my heart echoes all you feel. If I am spared, please God, your sympathy will be the consolation of my life."

At this moment the Duchesse de Sennécy opened the door, in order to cross the ante-room. The King started up at the noise, and walked quickly towards another door opposite. The Duchess stopped; looked first at Mademoiselle de Lafayette seated alone, covered with blushes, then at the retreating figure of the King. She took in the whole situation at a glance. It was too tempting an opportunity to throw away. There was a favour she specially desired to ask. This was the

very moment. In his present state of confusion the King, only to get rid of her, was sure to grant it. She rushed after him, and before Louis could reach the door, she had seized upon him and spoken.

When he had gone the Duchess ran up to Louise, who was now stitching at some embroidery to hide her blushes, and burst out laughing.

"You are merry, Duchess," said the maid of honour, glad that anything should divert attention from herself.

"I am laughing, Louise, at the admirable presence of mind I have just shown. As you are only a *débutante*, I will explain what I mean for your special instruction. His Majesty does not exactly hate me, but something very like it. No love is lost between us. He dreads my making capital of all I see and hear to the Queen. He dreads my turning him into ridicule—which is so easy. Of all the persons about Court whom he would least have liked to have surprised him in the tender conversation he was holding with you, I am the one. He tried to reach the door. I saw my advantage, and pursued him. I knew he wanted to shake me off, so I seized the opportunity to ask a favour—of great importance to me. It is

granted! Is not this clever? I am grateful, and will not repeat one word of this little adventure to her Majesty."

Louise shook her head, and affected not to understand her. "You are altogether mistaken, Duchess. His Majesty simply honours me with such friendship as he might feel towards any loyal subject devoted to his interests. It is because the Court affects to despise him that I appear singular in estimating him at his true value; nothing else."

"You are a prude," exclaimed the Duchess bluntly. "I hate affectation, especially of that kind." Louise hung her head down, and played with some pearls with which the grey silk dress she wore was trimmed. "Besides, my little cousin, you must not sacrifice the interest of your friends, who have a right to look to you for favour and patronage."

"Oh, Duchess, what a vile thought!" cried Louise, reddening. "Do you think I would make his Majesty's friendship a matter of barter?"

"Oh, bah!" replied the Duchess, growing angry. "Louise, you are not so simple as you pretend. If you ask me the question, I reply, certainly your friends have a right to look to you—especially myself, who never let the Queen rest until she

appointed you her maid of honour. She had almost made a vow never to fill up the place of her dear Mademoiselle de Hautefort." Louise stared at the Duchess with a troubled look. Worldliness and meanness was a new and unpleasant experience —a fresh page in the history of the Court—that pained and revolted her.

"When the King returns," continued Madame de Sennécy, not condescending to notice her disapprobation, "I shall expect you to give me all your confidence. You shall have excellent advice in return. If you follow it, in six months' time you will revolutionise the Court, and banish Cardinal Richelieu. You will by that one act secure the King's friendship and her Majesty's favour. Eh, Louise? a brilliant position for a little *provinciale* like you! You must mind what you are about, or the Queen will grow jealous. I will take care, on the first opportunity, to assure her you are only acting in her interests."

"Jealous of me! Impossible!" cried Louise. "Such a great Queen!—so beautiful, so fascinating! Oh, Duchess, you are joking."

"Nothing of the kind. I warn you not to imagine that there is any joking at Court, or you will find yourself mistaken. Now I shall leave

you, Louise. Think over what I have said. Remember what you owe to those friends whose influence has placed you in your present high position."

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As soon as the Duchess left her, Mademoiselle de Lafayette hastened to her room, locked the door and sat down to reflect calmly upon all that had passed. She was disgusted with the coarse selfishness of the Duchess, whom she determined for the future to avoid. Then her heart melted within her as she recalled the King's tender farewell. How eagerly his eyes had sought hers! How melodious was his tremulous voice! How tenderly he had pressed her hand! He had spoken out: he wanted a friend; he had made choice of her; he had promised her all his confidence! Delicious thought!

No one had ever dreamed of attaching the slightest blame to his intimacy with Mademoiselle de Hautefort. It would be therefore absurd to reject his advances. She was safe, she felt, entirely safe in his high principles, his delicacy, and his honour. If she could only teach him to be as firm as he was winning, release him from the bondage of favourites, emancipate him from the tyranny of Richelieu, and deserve his gratitude—perhaps his

affection! With what energy she would address him on his return, and remonstrate with him on his indolence, his indifference! With his courage, his powers of mind (in which she sincerely believed), his sensibility and gentleness, guided by her devoted far-seeing friendship, might he not equal his father as a sovereign—surpass him, perhaps, as much as he now does in morals, as a man? All these vague ideas floated through the brain of the simple-minded girl as she sat musing within the solitude of her chamber.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

TEMPTED.

News came from the army announcing brilliant success. The valour of the King was specially extolled; he was no longer a bashful, feeble prince, victimised by feminine cabals, tyrannized over by Richelieu. He had suddenly become a warrior, foremost in danger, leading his troops in person into the hottest of the fray. Each day his absence lasted, and every fresh intelligence that arrived, added to the excitement of Louise de Lafayette. The danger to which he was exposed made her tremble.

She eagerly desired his return, not for the mere pleasure of seeing and conversing with him (though that was very dear to her), but because she was sure that the time had come when he would himself hold the reins of government, and display all that nobleness of character with which her romantic fancy had invested him. Such, at least, was the

conviction, however delusive, of the pretty maid of honour, who, lost in contemplation of the King's virtues, failed to perceive the state of her own heart.

At length the campaign terminated. Louis had re-taken all the places conquered by the Spaniards. They were in full retreat. The King returned to Paris, which, not having been considered out of danger from the attacks of the enemy, received him with transports of joy. Mademoiselle de Lafayette, a witness of the universal enthusiasm, saw in Louis the worthy successor of Henry the Great, and the inheritor of all his glory. Intoxicated by these dreams, she imagined that even her advice would be in future needless—that the King of his own accord would suppress the arrogance of Richelieu, and from henceforth exercise the royal authority alone.

The following day, the Court being at the Louvre, Louis visited the Queen at her lever. As he returned into the ante-room, he approached Louise de Lafayette. She was too much agitated even to welcome him. That Louis was also greatly moved was evident. The pallor that always overspread his face when excited, was almost death-like, and every feature worked con-

vulsively. For some moments they stood opposite each other, without saying a word. Then, overmastering his agitation, Louis addressed her in a low voice:—"I know not, mademoiselle, when we shall be able to resume those conversations which were so infinitely delightful—I am overwhelmed with business." Then, after glancing round, and seeing that every one had retired, he seized her hand and kissed it tenderly.

"Ah! so much the better," said Louise, beaming with smiles. "May you, Sire, ever be thus occupied."

"Do you want to banish me, then, just as I am returned?" said he, retaining her hand in both of his.

"No, Sire; but I want to see you reign."

"You have heard me blamed for my indolence? I am sure you have. All I ask is, that you will wait and judge for yourself. The Court is filled with my enemies." He spoke with animation.

"Sire, I need not wait," replied the maid of honour eagerly, her liquid eyes, full of faith and affection, turned upon him, "I have long ago decided in your favour."

"May you never change!" ejaculated Louis fervently. "It would console me for a world of

injustice. I must now leave you," and he pressed her hand again and raised it to his lips.

The eagerness with which Louis applied himself to state affairs after his return, evoked much mirth and ridicule among the ladies of the Court. Louise de Lafayette was pained. When Madame de Sennécy declared that his Majesty's industry could not possibly last, she was offended in the highest degree. The Cardinal too was openly abused for the military appointments he had made during the war by these fair critics, whereupon Louise, who dared not openly defend the King, endeavoured to justify him by exonerating the Cardinal. One morning, when both King and minister had been bitterly attacked in the ante-room, before the Queen had left her apartments, Louise remarked to those around her that the Cardinal, though unpopular, was undeniably great; that he had founded the Académie Française, rebuilt the Sorbonne, established the Royal Printing Press, founded the Jardin des Plantes, and that as a minister he was brave, daring, and wise.

These sentiments caused great surprise, for Mademoiselle de Lafayette had hitherto by no means spared Richelieu. The Duchesse de Sennécy openly rebuked her for what she styled her "hypocrisy,"

and sent her in tears to her room. Her words, however, were immediately reported to the Cardinal by Chavigny, a gentleman of the bedchamber, who was present, one of the many salaried court spies in his pay. Chavigny particularly dwelt upon the earnestness of the maid of honour, and assured the Cardinal that she could only have so expressed herself in order to gain his favour.

No sooner had Chavigny left the Palais Royal than the Comte de la Meilleraye, a distant relation of Richelieu, requested an audience. La Meilleraye was also in attendance on the King. He had come, as he said, to ask a great favour of his all-powerful cousin. Would the Cardinal assist him to a most advantageous marriage with a lady to whom he was devoted—Mademoiselle de Lafayette? From the first moment he had seen her, he said, her beauty, her elegance, her modest bearing and simplicity—qualities so rare in the Court circle—had enchanted him. Thus spoke the Comte de la Meilleraye. Richelieu listened graciously. He liked by all legitimate means to advance his family, and if the maid of honour was his partisan, as Chavigny had reported, nothing could be more expedient than such a marriage. He promised therefore to consult the King at once, and to endeavour

to obtain his permission, warning La Meilleraye to do nothing in the matter until he had heard again from him.

The morning Council of State over, Richelieu accompanied the King into his writing-closet, to discuss in private some important matters.

As the Queen's coterie had predicted, Louis soon wearied of business, and everything was now replaced, as before, in the hands of the minister.

Louis leant back in his chair. He scarcely heard the Cardinal's remarks.

From time to time, when specially appealed to, he bowed his head in acquiescence. Then turning away his eyes abstractedly towards the windows, which faced the inner court, he anxiously watched the driving clouds that scudded across the sky. He had fixed a hunting-party at Rambouillet, and longed to start as soon as the weather cleared, and Richelieu had left him.

The mellow voice of the Cardinal, who, however imperative in action, never startled his feeble master by any outward display of vehemence, had continued speaking for some time in a monotonous tone, when the King, seeing the sunshine appear, suddenly rose.

"Your eminence has, I imagine, done with me

for to-day," said he, looking eagerly towards the door.

"Yes, Sire; but there is still a trifling matter upon which I would ask your decision."

"Pray mention it," replied Louis, tapping his boots with a riding-whip he had taken off a table.

"My relative, the Comte de la Meilleraye, begs your permission to marry."

"Willingly," replied Louis; "who is the fair lady, Cardinal?"

"It is Mademoiselle Louise de Lafayette, Sire, maid of honour to the Queen."

If a thunderbolt had fallen at his feet, Louis could not have been more overcome. He turned perfectly livid, took a long breath, tottered backwards and sat down again. The all-seeing eyes of the Cardinal were fixed upon him; he did not speak but watched his master. Louis for some moments did not raise his head; then he heaved a deep sigh, and with much effort, in a strangely different voice, asked faintly—

"Does Mademoiselle de Lafayette herself desire this marriage?"

Richelieu had turned away, and affecting to be busied with some books and papers lying on the table, replied in an indifferent manner—

"As yet, Sire, we are unacquainted with the lady's sentiments; but, as I am informed she has no other attachment, I cannot but believe such an alliance as that of my cousin will be acceptable to her."

The nervous spasm with which it was evident the King had awaited this reply instantly relaxed. The colour returned to his cheeks, his eyes brightened, and he stood up—

"Before I can decide anything," said he, "I must know Mademoiselle de Lafayette's feelings; acquaint me with them speedily."

He spoke in a firm, decided way, very unusual with him.

The Cardinal drew his own conclusions.

* * * * * *

By-and-by Chavigny informed Richelieu that Mademoiselle de Lafayette had at once, and unhesitatingly, refused the hand of the Count. Richelieu only smiled. "I knew it. The King, my good Chavigny, is in love with her himself. She returns it. They understand each other. Chavigny, I must see this foolish girl, who ventures to mix herself up with his Majesty. I must personally acquaint myself with her feelings."

"Your Eminence will find it most difficult to

speak with her in private. The Duchesse de Sennécy proposes giving a masked ball, at which her Majesty and the Court will be present; would that suit your plans?"

"Not at all," replied Richelieu. "When I speak there must be no mask. I must study her countenance. She is young and disingenuous. I shall read her inmost thoughts. She has not been long enough at Court to have learnt dissimulation. I must see her before the King leaves Paris. We can meet at my niece's, the Duchesse de Combalet."

"Mademoiselle de Lafayette could only feel honoured by such a summons from your Eminence," replied Chavigny.

"Yes, I fancy she will accept the offers I shall make her, unless she is an absolute idiot."

Mademoiselle de Lafayette was duly invited to a *déjeûner* at the Palais Cardinal by the Duchesse de Combalet, who received her alone. During breakfast her hostess said everything that could flatter and please her. She praised her dress and her appearance. She was so simple, so unselfish, so different from the other maids of honour, the Duchess said. Then she went on to inform her that she knew the Cardinal had the highest opinion of her; that he had

often expressed his admiration of her character and her person to herself, the Duchess. "It is very unusual with him, mademoiselle, to speak to me about the Queen's ladies; he is too much engrossed with state affairs, too serious to notice them. But you are an exception; you have made a deep impression on my uncle."

Louise bowed, grew red and white by turns, and listened in wondering silence.

Suddenly the door opened, and Cardinal Richelieu appeared, followed by two favourite cats. Smiling benignly, he received the maid of honour with great condescension. Mademoiselle de Lafayette rose at his entrance, and was about to withdraw, when he took her hand and insisted on her reseating herself.

The Duchesse de Combalet spoke with him on general subjects, and constantly appealed to Louise for her opinion. She gave it with her usual modest frankness. Everything she said was applauded by the Cardinal. He put forth all his powers to please her.

In about half an hour a servant entered and whispered to the Duchess. She affected great annoyance at the interruption, and begged the Cardinal and her guest to excuse her for a quarter of an

hour, while she gave some directions. "Besides," said she, and she turned with a meaning look to the maid of honour, "I know that his Eminence wants to have a little private conversation with you about our cousin De la Meilleraye, whom you have so cruelly refused. Poor man! he is in despair. I shall return in a few minutes." Saying which she kissed Mademoiselle de Lafayette on both cheeks, and withdrew.

Richelieu and the maid of honour were now alone. The Cardinal was no longer the dissolute prelate of other days, the adorer of two queens of France, the slave of Madame de Chevreuse, the lover of Marion de l'Orme. The life of labour he led would have long ago killed any but a man of his iron will and calm temperament. He never slept more than three hours at a time, and literally worked day and night. At eight o'clock in the morning he was astir, ready to receive spies, generals, and ministers, suppliants, and princes, who were already waiting in the anteroom. He was as active as a Roman senator, with a hundred clients assembled in his portico. His cheeks were pinched and sunken; his face sallow; his thin lips colourless; his brow, a network of those fine wrinkles that come of excessive

thought. Even his eyes were dull, and half concealed by his eyelids, though on occasions they would still shoot forth sparks of fire. The straight hair that lay upon his forehead, under his red *calotte*, was scanty and almost white. Altogether, his appearance was that of a man physically worn-out, and indicative of his painful illness and somewhat premature death. But the spirit of the man was strong within him, and a consciousness of latent power disclosed itself in every feature.

As he leant back in a spacious arm-chair, with the two cats seated on his knees, he bent his half-closed eyes upon Louise with almost feline cunning. Those half-closed eyes alone betrayed his nature; otherwise, his countenance expressed nothing but tranquil enjoyment.

"Mademoiselle de Lafayette," he said in a soft, musical voice that struck pleasantly upon the ear, "I have both to reproach you and to thank you." Louise looked at him with surprise. "Yes, I thank you for the favour with which I hear you speak of me; and I reproach you for having hitherto concealed from me your good opinion. I am desirous to see you become a member of my family. I hope you will marry my cousin. But, believe me, the ties of gratitude are stronger with

me than those of blood. Mademoiselle, I wish to be your friend." Louise bowed her head with great respect, but felt bewildered.

Richelieu piqued himself on being a great physiognomist. He had made a special study of the human countenance. He saw that the face of Mademoiselle de Lafayette was totally untroubled. Her perfect self-possession astonished him. The phrase he had uttered—"I wish to be your friend," solemn words, indeed, from the mouth of Richelieu—had caused in her no change of expression! Her composed demeanour was, in the eyes of the Cardinal, an additional reason for securing her as a partisan. He had before much desired to gain her to himself, but he now came to attach an immense importance to success.

"I am very grateful for your Eminence's kind expressions," said Louise at last, with great modesty, but with equal firmness; "but I do not wish to marry. If the offer of your friendship involves any sacrifice of my freedom, I must, with sorrow, decline it. I seek nothing, your Eminence. I need no protection." There was a quiet dignity in her words and manner that took the Cardinal aback. He said nothing; but his eyes, now fully open and glistening, rested on the maid of honour with surprise and displeasure.

Yet the real loftiness of soul she displayed, the indifference with which she ignored his offers, appeared to him so unaccountable that he could only imagine she wished to extract from him some terms more definite and decided. This idea gave him courage to recommence the attack.

"Let us be frank," said he, smiling. "I know all."

"What do you mean, monseigneur?"

"The King loves you. The purity of his heart and his high principles may allow you to confess it. He loves you. And his interest, as well as your own, requires that we should be friends."

Mademoiselle de Lafayette grew very pale; she trembled, but did not for a moment lose her presence of mind. "To what sort of friendship does your Eminence allude?"

"An entire confidence on your part, and an active acknowledgment on mine."

The Cardinal was on the point of promising her titles, estates, and pensions; but Mademoiselle de Lafayette, who, with downcast eyes, listened to him in silence, all at once looked up fixedly into his face. This look stopped him short.

"Your Eminence," said she, "can only wish me to give my personal confidence. In honour

I could promise no other. But I *have* no secrets, no concealments. I am without ambition, I desire no favour. Besides, I am sure that your Eminence will at once understand me when I say—that, if ever it were the pleasure of his Majesty to repose confidence in me—*there is no temptation, no power upon earth*, that would induce me to betray it." As she spoke, she looked straight at the Cardinal. The colour returned to her cheeks, and she sat erect—gentle, yet infinitely bold.

Richelieu reddened, but he suppressed his rising indignation. "The confidence of a great King," replied he solemnly, a dark fire darting from his eyes, "can only be properly accepted when the person to whom it is addressed is capable of offering real assistance to the sovereign. I propose, Mademoiselle de Lafayette, to render you capable of imparting such assistance. Whatever may be your natural sense and penetration, this is an occasion in which experience alone is valuable."

"But does not your Eminence think that rectitude of purpose——"

"It is evident that you are little versed in the intrigues of courts, mademoiselle," answered he loftily, eyeing her through half-closed lids with disdain. "Perhaps some day you will discover that the

offer I have made you of my esteem and assistance is not to be despised."

"No one can attach a higher value than I do to the good opinion of your Eminence," interposed Mademoiselle de Lafayette with warmth; "but I do not think you have at all proved it in what you have just said. Although I think I deserve it," she added timidly.

The Cardinal contemplated her attentively for some moments. His face was set, his eyes flashed, and his hands which were clenched rested on his knees. "I have only one word more to add," said he in an angry voice. "Any idea of favour with the King without my support is a delusion." He was rapidly losing self-restraint. This girl had lashed him into a fury. She saw it, but felt no fear.

"Your Eminence, I think only of my duty," she replied with firmness. "I fear no threats. I can make no promise."

At these words the Cardinal rose. His face was swoll[illegible]; a wicked fire gleamed in his eye[illegible] transported him beyond endurance [illegible]emoiselle de Lafayette, remember[illegible] resolutions are unalterable [illegible] everything. Without

my assistance, beware! Think of the future. Recall the past. My enemies are rotting in their graves—my friends rule France." Then, speaking more calmly, he added, "You are too great a fool to understand what you are doing. I can pardon your presumption, however, because I know how to cure it. Mademoiselle de Lafayette, you may withdraw."

NOTES TO VOL. I.

Note 1, p. 5.

Francis I., born at Cognac, was the only son of Charles d'Orleans, Duc d'Angoulême. After the death of two sons, born to Louis XII. by his wife, Anne de Bretagne, he created his relative, Francis, Duc de Valois, married him to his daughter, Claude, and selected him as his successor to the throne.

Note 2, p. 8.

Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, one of the oldest churches in France, dedicated to St. Germain, Bishop of Paris, by Chilperic. Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois, Saint-Etienne du Mont, the Hôtel de Clugny, and the Hôtel de Sens, all dating from a very early period, still remain.

Note 3, p. 30.

Gentille Agnès plus de loy tu mérite,
La cause était de France recouvrir ;
Que ce que peut dedans un cloître ouvrir,
Close nonnaine ? ou bien dévot hermite ?

Note 4, p. 42.

The Duc d'Alençon, husband of Marguerite de Valois, sister of Francis, who commanded the left wing of the French army, was the only man who showed himself a coward at Pavia. He turned and fled, with his whole division.

NOTE 5, p. 62.

Triboulet had been court fool to Louis XII., who first discerned his good qualities, and rescued him from a most forlorn position. Triboulet's sayings are almost a chronicle of the time, so much was he mixed up with the life of the two sovereigns he served. Brusquet, who compiled the "Fools' Calendar," succeeded him in the office of jester to Francis.

NOTE 6, p. 74.

Francis's exact words, according to Du Bellay, were—"Les Guises mettront mes enfans en pourpoint et mon pauvre peuple en chemise." This prophecy was poetised into the following verse:—

"François premier prédit ce mot,
Que ceux de la maison de Guise,
Mettraient ses enfans en pourpoint
Et son pauvre peuple en chemise."

NOTE 7, p. 80.

The Palace des Tournelles (so named from its many towers) stood in the Rue Saint-Antoine, opposite the Hôtel de Saint-Paul, upon the site of the Place Royale. Charles VI. was confined here when insane, by his wife, Isabeau de Bavière. The Duke of Bedford, Regent of France for Henry VI., a minor, lodged here. After the expulsion of the English from Paris, Charles VII. made it his residence. Louis XI. and Louis XII. inhabited it. The latter monarch died here.

NOTE 8, p. 89.

Another cotemporary says that the Queen of Navarre was invited to Marcel's, the Prévôt of Paris, where, having eaten some *confitures*, she fell sick, and died five days afterwards.

Note 9, p. 94.

Charles de Guise, Cardinal de Lorraine, was Minister under Francis II. and Charles IX. He endeavoured, without success, to introduce the Inquisition into France.

Note 10, p. 131.

No sooner had Catherine de Medici built the Tuileries, than she left it to inhabit the Hôtel de Soissons (then called Hôtel de la Reine), in the parish of Saint-Eustache, in consequence of a prediction that she would die at Saint-Germain. The Hôtel de Soissons, as well as the Hôtel de Nesle, is now amalgamated into the Halle au Blés. At the Hôtel de Soissons, Catherine lived for some years before her death.

Note 11, p. 169.

Coligni was prosecuted as accessory to the murder of Francis, Duc de Guise, by his widow, Anna di Ferrara, but no sentence was pronounced.

Note 12, p. 172.

Henri de Navarre then went to *le prêche*, Marguerite to mass.

Note 13, p. 175.

"Memoirs and Letters of Marguerite de Valois," published by the Société de l'Histoire de France, by M. Guessand, 1842.

Note 14, p. 182.

Coligni's head was cut off, embalmed, and sent to Rome as a trophy. His remains were collected and buried by his friend, Montmorenci, at Chantilly. Before their removal from Montfaucon, Charles and all his Court rode to see them. One of the courtiers observed "that the body smelt foul." "Nay," replied Charles, "the body of an enemy always smells sweet."

Note 15, p. 184.

Sully's Account of the Massacre of St. Bartholomew.

"I felt myself awakened at three hours after midnight by the loud ringing of all the bells, and the confused cries of the populace. My governor, Saint-Just, and my valet went out. I never heard any more of them. I continued alone in my chamber, dressing myself, when in a few moments I saw my landlord enter, pale and astonished. He was of the reformed religion. He came to persuade me to go with him to mass. I did not think proper to follow him, but resolved to try if I could gain the College of Burgundy, where I studied, notwithstanding the distance it was from the house where I lodged, which made the attempt very perilous. I put on my scholar's robe, and taking a large prayer-book under my arm, I went out. Upon entering the street, I was seized with horror at the sight of the furies who rushed from all parts, and burst open the houses, bawling out 'Slaughter, slaughter—massacre the Huguenots!' the blood which I saw shed before my eyes redoubled my terror. I fell into the midst of a body of guards; they stopped me, questioned me, and were beginning to use me ill, when, happily for me, the book that I carried was perceived, and served me as a passport. At last I arrived at the College of Burgundy, when a danger far greater than any I had yet met with awaited me. The porter having twice refused me entrance, I remained in the midst of the street, at the mercy of the Catholic furies, whose numbers increased every moment, and who were evidently in quest of their prey, when I bethought myself of calling for the principal of the college, La Faye, a good man, who loved me tenderly. The porter, gained by some small pieces of money which I put into his hand, did not fail to make him come at once. This honest man led me into his chamber. Here two inhuman priests, whom I heard make mention of the Sicilian Vespers, wanted to force me from him, that they might cut me

in pieces, saying, 'The order was to kill to the very infants at the breast!' All that La Faye could do was to conduct me secretly to a remote closet, where he locked me up. I was there confined three days, uncertain of my destiny, receiving succour only from a domestic belonging to this charitable man, who brought me from time to time something to preserve my life."

NOTE 16, p. 188.

According to Dufresnay, "Tables Chronologiques," vol. ii., seventy thousand Huguenots perished in the massacre of St. Bartholomew, which lasted seven days and seven nights. One man boasted that he had killed four hundred with his own hand.

NOTE 17, p. 190.

It was the renown of these victories that gained for Henry the crown of Poland.

NOTE 18, p. 203.

Comte d'Auvergne, son of Charles IX. by Marie Touchet, illegitimate nephew of Henry III. and half-brother of Henriette d'Entragues.

NOTE 19, p. 216.

Henry IV. was the son of Antoine de Bourbon, Duc de Vendôme, and of Jeanne d'Albret, only daughter of Henri d'Albret, King of Navarre, married to Marguerite d'Alençon, sister of Francis I., the widow of the Duc d'Alençon.

NOTE 20, p. 221.

Chicot was a Gascon, jester to Henry IV. His *specialité* was intense hatred to the Duc de Mayenne, whom he constantly attempted to attack. During an engagement at Bures, he made prisoner the Comte de Chaligny, and carried him into Henry's

presence. "*Tiens!*" said he, "this is my prisoner." Chaligny was so enraged at having been captured by a buffoon, that he poniarded Chicot on the spot.

NOTE 21, p. 342.

Marie de Medici died in poverty at Cologne, aged sixty-nine.

NOTE 22, p. 345.

The Duchesse de Montbazon died suddenly at Paris of measles. De Rancé was in the country at the time; no one dared tell him what had happened. On his return to Paris he ran up the stairs into her rooms, expecting to find her. There he found an open coffin, containing the corpse of Madame de Montbazon. The head was severed from the body (the coffin having been made too short), and lay outside on the winding sheet. Such is the story according to the "Veritable Motifs de la Conversion de l'Abbé de la Trappe." Other authorities contradict these details.

NOTE 23, p. 382.

Now the military hospital of the Val de Grâce, 277, Rue Saint-Jacques. Anne of Austria having been married twenty-two years without issue, vowed that she would build a new church within the convent, if she bore an heir to the throne. After the death of her husband, Louis XIII., she fulfilled her vow. The first stone of the present church was laid in 1645, by her son, Louis XIV.

END OF VOL. I.

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